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featuring:

Harlan Ellison's "Run for the Stars"

Third Anniversary Issue

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Cover / James Fox
painting © 1981 James Fox

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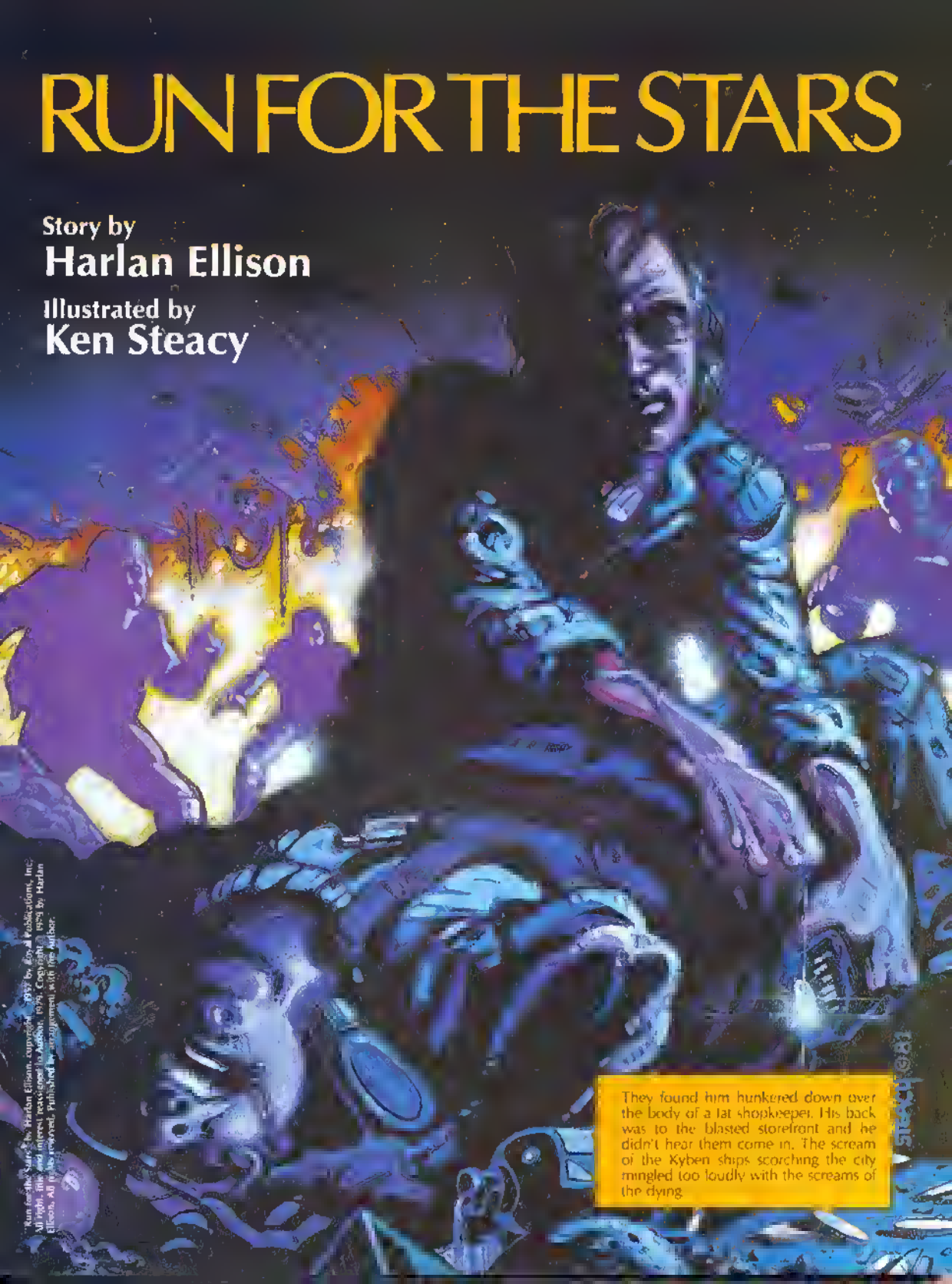
RUN FOR THE STARS

Story by
Harlan Ellison

Illustrated by
Ken Steacy


They found him hunkered down over the body of a fat shopkeeper. His back was to the blasted storefront and he didn't hear them come in. The scream of the Kyben ships scorching the city mingled too loudly with the screams of the dying.
STEACY

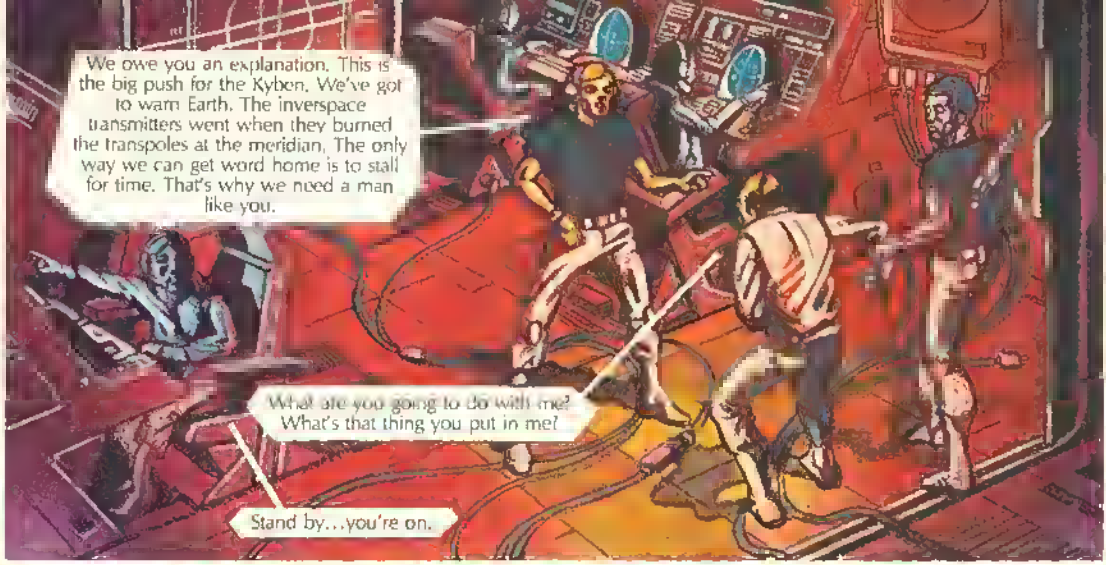
"Run for the Stars" by Harlan Ellison. copyright © 1957 by Ziff-Davis Publications, Inc. All right, title and interest reassigned to Author, 1974. Copyright © 1979 by Harlan Ellison. All rights reserved. Published by arrangement with the Author.

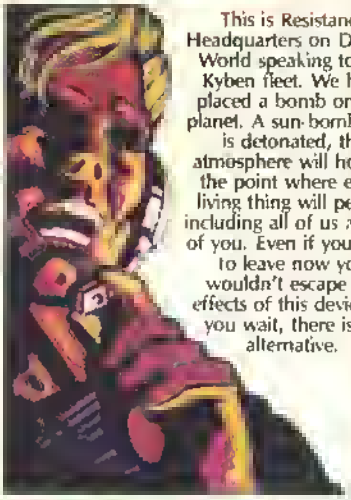
Lemme go! He was dead! I only wanted money to buy food — honest to God, lemme go!
This is a grocery store you ghoul! There's food all over.
There was no use arguing and he couldn't tell them the money was to get narcotics. The entire planet was under siege and looters were shot. Perhaps it was better that way; in death the insatiable craving for the dream-dust would stop, and he would be free. But the thought of death sent chills through his body, numbing his muscles.
This the best we can do for chrissake? There's gotta be someone better!
No, Shep, I think this is our man. A dustie. Perfect. We've been looking all day for you, fella.
Whaddya want with me? Lemme go willya!
Come on, we'll let Doc Budder go to work on him.
Behind them, the fat shopkeeper lay amidst the debris of his store, dead, safe and uncaring.

Benno Talliant awoke during the operation. He promptly fainted again.
When he awoke the second time he remembered abruptly.
What was that? What have you done to me?
Why this snivelling garbage, Parkhurst? We've a dozen good men who would've volonteered.
Because the best job can be done by somebody who's afraid of the thing, someone who'll run.
Oh God, it hurts! All over here...do something!
Self-induced cramp. Stop whining, you slug! The guidermizer is healing you through the sheet: you haven't a thing to worry about...right now.
We'll be back. Don't try and get out. Aside from the fact that there's a guard on the door, you might open that incision and bleed to death before we find you.

Taliant's thoughts weren't deterred by the darkness. He remembered the dream-dust and the pains shot through him again; he remembered the past, and his mouth choked up; he remembered awakening during the operation, and he wanted to scream. The next six hours were a bright, thinking hell.

Get dressed.
L-listen...do y-you know where I can lay my hands on some dream-dust...I-
No, you listen to me!
About two million people are dead out there; almost the entire population of this planet, and you sit there asking me to
you to death right now — so don't say another word! Now move it!

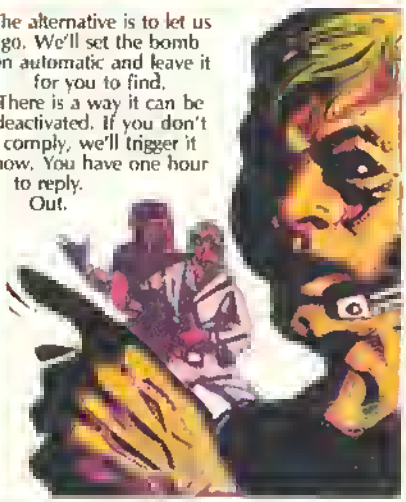

We owe you an explanation. This is the big push for the Kyben. We've got to warn Earth. The inverspace transmitters went when they burned the transpoles at the meridian. The only way we can get word home is to stall for time. That's why we need a man like you.
What are you going to do with me? What's that thing you put in me?
Stand by...you're on.



This is Resistance Headquarters on Deald's World speaking to the Kyben fleet. We have placed a bomb on this planet. A sun-bomb. If it is detonated, the atmosphere will heat to the point where every living thing will perish, including all of us and all of you. Even if you were to leave now you wouldn't escape the effects of this device. If you wait, there is an alternative.

Tallant suddenly knew what Parkhurst meant: he knew where the bomb was hidden. He started to scream, but Shep's hand was over his mouth before the sound could escape.

The alternative is to let us go. We'll set the bomb on automatic and leave it for you to find. There is a way it can be deactivated. If you don't comply, we'll trigger it now. You have one hour to reply. Out.

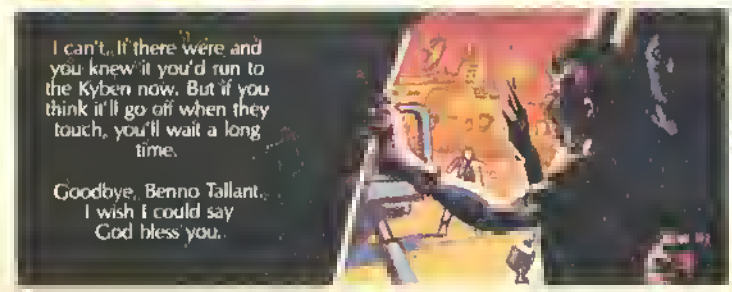


Part of that might be a bluff: there may not be a way to damp the bomb.

Exactly sixty minutes later the translating machine broke the silence with a cold metallic voice the product of changing Kyben to English
We accept. You have seven hours to load and leave.
Let's get moving.
What about me? Tell me!

The Kyben have tracing devices; they'd locate the bomb in a moment if it were stationary. But it won't be. They'll think we're all gone but you'll be here carrying the bomb. You're our insurance policy..
What if I turn myself in and let them take it out like you put it in?
won't. The first soldier who traces the bomb to you will pin you to the ground and slice you open. So the longer you keep running, the longer it takes to find you, nd the better chance we have of warning Earth. In about seven hours you become real valuable. know, you've got t life of the entire Kyben fleet in your lly!

The launch field was silent at last. The noise of loading the remaining thousands of Dealders had crashed back and forth for hours, and now the last ship was ready.


I can't.. If there were and you knew it you'd run to the Kyben now. But if you think it'll go off when they touch, you'll wait a long time.
Goodbye, Benno Tallant.. I wish I could say God bless you..

He was alone.
He felt the hunger rising once more. This time he could drown himself in dream-dust and lie there in heaven till the bomb went off.

He returned to the bunker and found the

trapdoor that led down to Headquarters. A half-hour of smashing into lockers and he found Doc Budder's supply of medical dream-dust.

He snorted a packet and felt himself getting stronger. Kyben? Yes, bring them on!

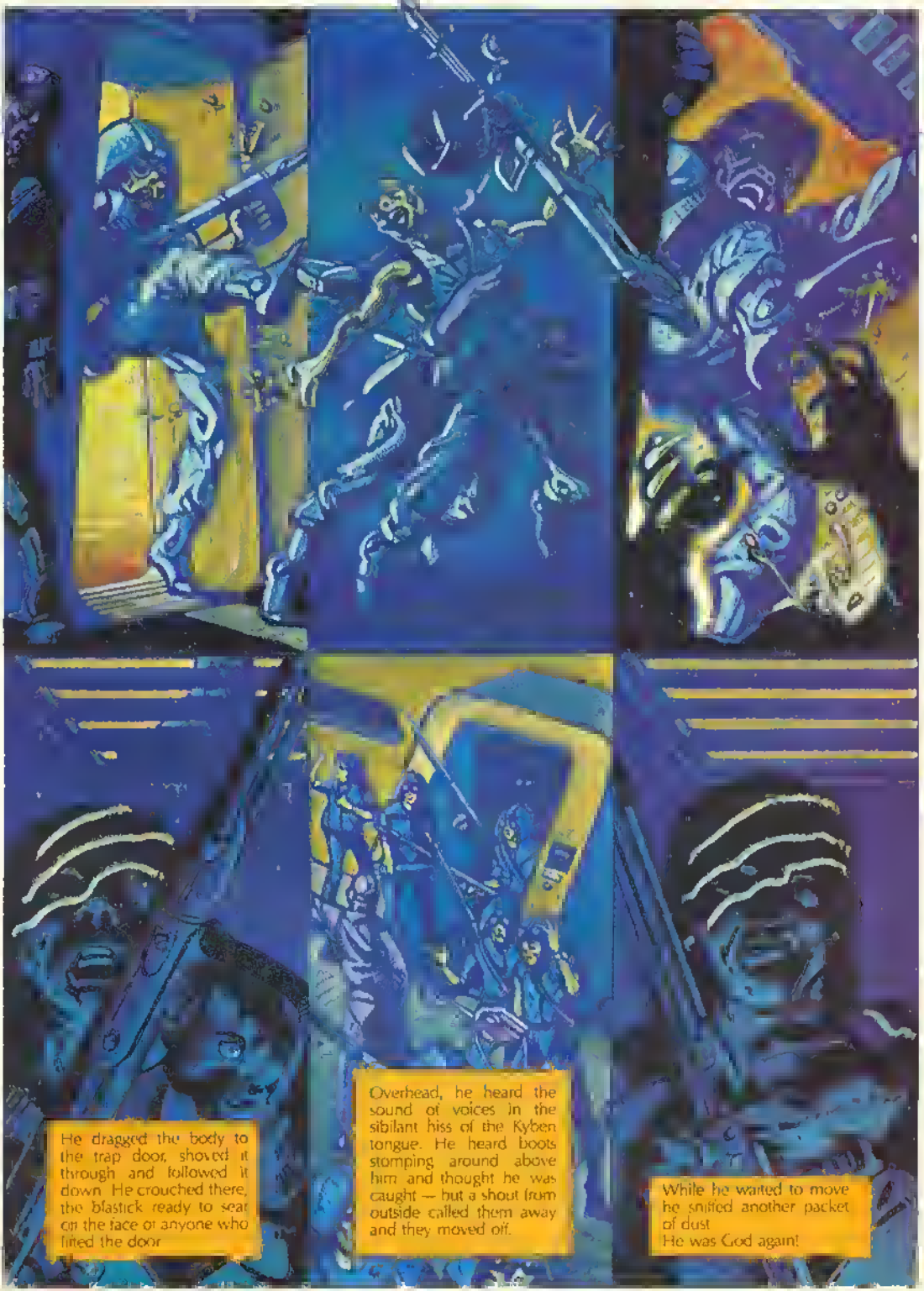
He stuffed his pockets full of white packets and strutted back up to the bunker.

Then Tallant saw his first Kyban.

Abruptly, the resemblance to humans terrified him. Had they been grotesque he could hate them as monsters. But they were, if anything, more handsome than humans.

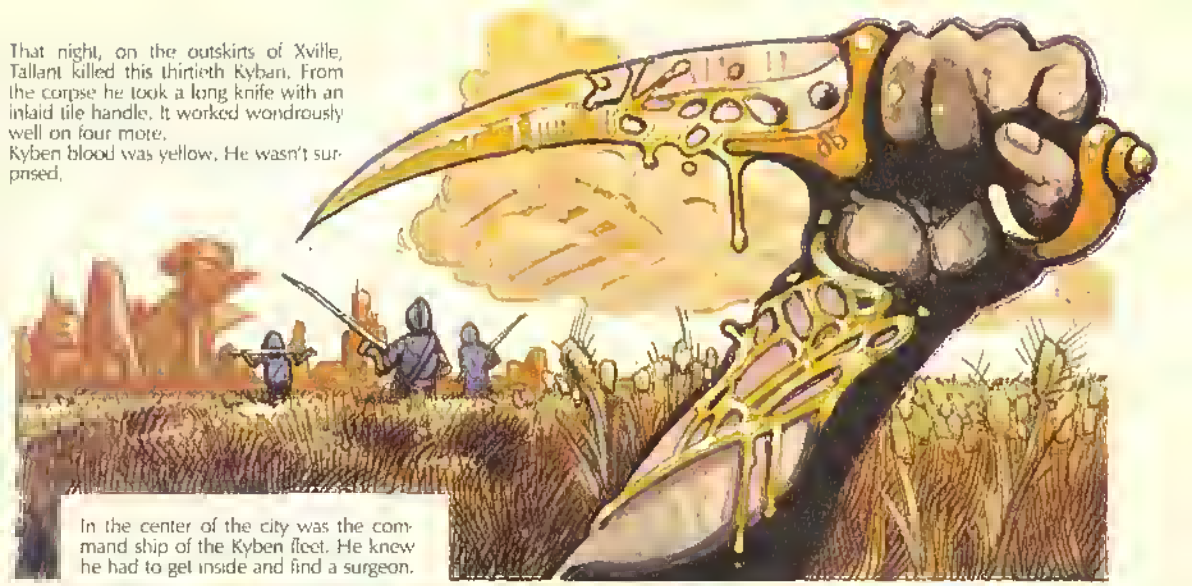
Suddenly Tallant realized that she was trapped. There was only one exit and the field was crawling with Kyben — furious enough at having been outfoxed to gut the first human they encountered.

But he found a new strength and he knew what to do.


He dragged the body to the trap door, shoved it through and followed it down. He crouched there, the blastick ready to seat on the face of anyone who lifted the door.
Overhead, he heard the sound of voices in the sibilant hiss of the Kyben tongue. He heard boots stomping around above him and thought he was caught — but a shout from outside called them away and they moved off.
While he waited to move he sniffed another packet of dust.
He was God again!

He made it as far as the Blue Marshes before another patrol found him. He'd been circling outward so that any ships tracking overhead could not pinpoint him. Eventually they would see that the target was not stationary and would recognize what the humans had done. He kept moving.
Tallant found an inexplicable identification with the beast. *It had been more man than they. It had not turned and run.* Something in its death made him feel altered, matured. He knew now that he would never give up, and if he died, he would die on his feet.
The Kyben were too engrossed in examining their kill to study their detectors. Tallant knew he had to kill them all or the game was up.

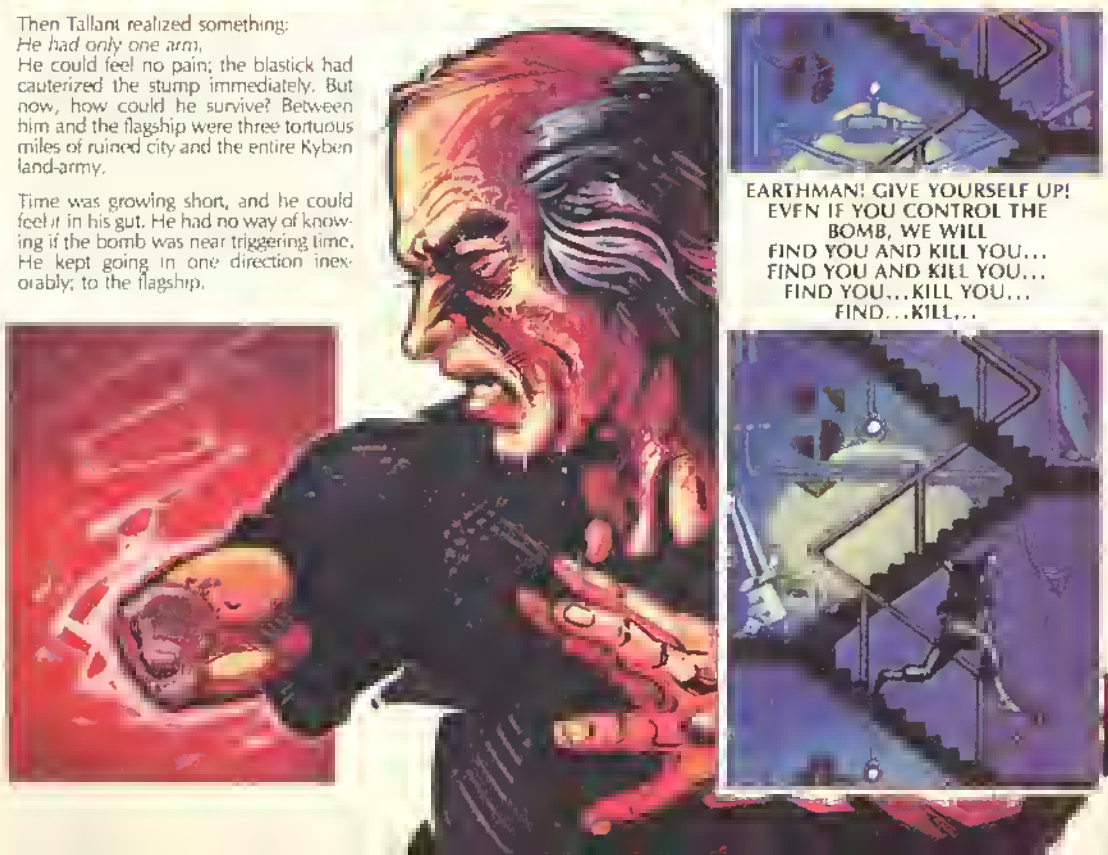
He stared down at the pulsing husks that had been alive a minute before. He thought of the dust, but felt no need for it now. The killer instinct was rising in the coward.


That night, on the outskirts of Xville, Tallant killed this thirtieth Kyban. From the corpse he took a long knife with an inlaid tile handle. It worked wondrously well on four more.
Kyben blood was yellow. He wasn't surprised.
In the center of the city was the command ship of the Kyben fleet. He knew he had to get inside and find a surgeon.

He was standing to go when the soldier stepped into the room and froze.
A human — here on conquered ground!

Then Tallant realized something:
He had only one arm.
He could feel no pain; the blastick had cauterized the stump immediately. But now, how could he survive? Between him and the flagship were three tortuous miles of ruined city and the entire Kyben land-army.

Time was growing short, and he could feel it in his gut. He had no way of knowing if the bomb was near triggering time. He kept going in one direction inexorably; to the flagship.


EARTHMAN! GIVE YOURSELF UP!
EVEN IF YOU CONTROL THE BOMB, WE WILL
FIND YOU AND KILL YOU...
FIND YOU AND KILL YOU...
FIND YOU...KILL YOU...
FIND...KILL...

CHAPTER TWO
INITIATION
SATURN! JOHN ISAAC'S ABDUCTORS PAUSE HERE TO MINE THE GIGANTIC ICE CRYSTALS THAT FORM THE RINGED PLANET'S TIARA...
ISAAC HIMSELF IS UNABLE TO WITNESS THE CELESTIAL VISTA...
...FOR SINCE LEAVING EARTH HE HAS HUNG LIKE A MUMMY IN A COCOON WOVEN BY THE XLEXU SURGEONS!
SWING TO, LADS! WITHOUT WATER THIS FINE LIMBED VESSEL WILL LEAVE US ALL HIGH AND DRY!
WOULD SUCH A LITTLE THING STOP OUR OWN CAPTAIN ROTWANG?
ON THE PAN-GALACTIC WHALING SHIP KNOWN TO HER CREW AS THE YORRIKKE, LIFE AND WORK CONTINUE...
SHUT THAT MEALY GOB, NEVERSWEAT! YOUR TACK HAMMER HAS YET TO KISS THE ICE / WHAT AILS YE THIS TIME?
'TIS NO AFFLICTION, MR. STAUB, BUT MERELY THE GERM OF A LITTLE VERSE THAT HAS BORN ITSELF TO ME ON THIS LOVELY SOLAR WIND!
1981 Veitch

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A VERSE IS IT? SING THEN, YE SLY DOG, AND LET THE REST OF THIS GANG BEAT TIME WITH THEIR HAMMERS!
WHY, THANKEE, MISTER STAUB!
:AHEM:
OLD ROTWANG WENT A'WHALIN', BUT HE COME BACK NONE TOO SOON. HE'D SWAPPED HIS LEG FOR AN UGLY PEG TO A WHALE 'TWAS BIG AS A MOON!
NOW THIS WHALE CAME DOWN FLUKES A'FLAILIN', AVENGIN' HIS FAMILY AND PRIDE. TO ROTWANG'S EYES SEEMED A FITTING PRIZE, "'TIS THE GREAT RED, ABRAXAS!" HE CRIED.
"TO THE BOATS, TO THE BOATS", SCREAMED THE CAPTAIN, BUT THE CREW FLED B'LOW DECKS, COURAGE FAILIN'. FOR THEY FEARED NOT THEIR MASTER AS MUCH AS DISASTER, SO THE OLD MAN WAS LEFT AT THE RAILIN'.
NOW ABRAXAS BEGINS THE DISMASTIN', THE SHIP STARTS TO DROP, NOW SHE CRASHES! THE CREW IS ALL FRIED WHEN THE FURNACE SPLITS WIDE, ONLY ROTWANG CRAWLS FROM THE ASHES.
SO ONCE AGAIN ROTWANG IS SAILIN', ONLY THIS TIME 'TIS **US** WHO'S HIS CREW, WILL WE KILL OLD ABRAXAS WHEN THE GREAT RED ATTACKS US, OR GO DOWN IN THIS LEAFY CANOE?
HEHE HAR HAR!
BRAVO, NEVERSWEAT!
HOHO! NEVERSWEAT HAS HIT THE MARK AGAIN AND GOT THE REST OF THE CREW TO DO HIS JOB TO BOOT!
BACK TO [illegible] RASCAL!
MISTER STAUB!

HAVE THAT MAN FLOGGED.
A-AYE, CAPTAIN ROTWANG...
TWENTY-FIVE SCREAMS ECHO THROUGHOUT THE SELF-RENEWING ATMOSPHERE OF THE YORRIKKE...
BUT THERE IS ONE ABOARD WHO IS OBLIVIOUS TO THE AGONY...
HIS BODY UNDERGOES WHAT THE XLEXU SURGEONS CALL "TRANSMUTATION"...
WHILE HIS MIND IS ON A JOURNEY TO THE DEEP SELF...
HE IS SOARING FAR BEYOND THE WALLS OF SLEEP, CONVERSING IN A SPEECH NEVER MEANT FOR HUMAN TONGUES...
I'M CONFUSED, XLEXU... IS THIS REAL OR AM I DREAMING?
IT IS BOTH, EARTHMAN... THE IMAGES YOU SEE MERELY ILLUSTRATE WHAT IS OCCURING IN YOUR BRAIN ON THE CHEMICAL LEVEL!

THE FACES ON THESE FIGUREHEADS LOOK SO FAMILIAR!
THIS IS THE REALM OF YOUR IMMORTAL NATURE EARTHMAN!
THESE ARE YOUR PAST LIVES!
THE ONE YOU ARE DIVING TOWARD-- IT HAS MY FACE! AM I DEAD THEN...?
NO, EARTHMAN-- BUT AS YOU WILL SEE WHEN YOU AWAKEN...
...THIS FACE IS A THING OF THE PAST!
NOTICE THE FISSURES RUNNING THROUGH THE FOREHEAD OF EACH FIGURE... THEY REPRESENT THE RIFT THAT EXISTS BETWEEN THE TWO HEMISPHERES OF THE HUMAN BRAIN...
W-WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
I WILL HEAL YOUR SPLIT, EARTHMAN...
HERE, WHERE THE STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY BETWEEN THE SIDES TAKES PLACE...
THE WAR OF THE OPPOSITES!

I GIVE YOU THE GIFT OF WHOLENESS, EARTHMAN...
USE IT WISELY!
LET THE TWO SPHERES BE JOINED!
TKKT TKKT TKKT TKKT
AS IF IN ANSWER TO THE GREAT MANTIS STACCATO, THE CHASM WALLS SLOWLY, INEXORABLY, BEGIN TO CONVERGE!
RUMBLE CRUMBLE
KRUNCH!

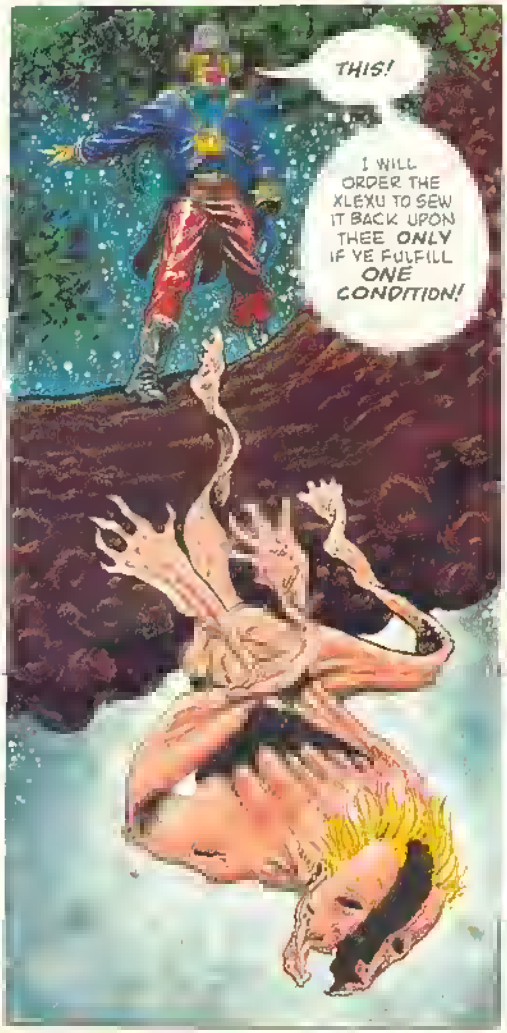
THE YORRIKKE HAS LEFT SATURN FAR BEHIND WHEN THE DREAMER FINALLY WAKES...
OOOOH...
AND MILLIONS OF MILES FROM HIS HOME PLANET...
UHNNG.
AN EARTHMAN IS REBORN!
AAAARRGH!
HE TEARS THE BIRTH-SAC AWAY FROM HIS MOUTH...
IN THE DREAMS THE XLEXU SAID HE'D RESTRUCTURED MY LUNGS...
BUT I STILL NEED AIR!
STRIPPING THE GAUZE FROM HIS EYES HE BEHOLDS A NEW SPECTRUM!
MY GOD! IT'S BEYOND BELIEF!
INFRA-RED, ULTRA-VIOLET, RADIO WAVES, I CAN SEE THEM ALL--AND MORE!
REMOVING THE NETTING THAT REMAINS HE RISES UNSTEADILY TO HIS FEET...
UNDER THE BIRTH-SAC...SOME SORT OF THIN TRANSPARENT MEMBRANE HAS GROWN OVER ME--REPLACING MY HUMAN SKIN!!
LOOK AT ME!
THEY'VE MUTATED ME... PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY --INTO WHAT?
CHOKE!
STILL-- IF ONLY HALF OF WHAT THE XLEXU SHOWED ME IS TRUE...

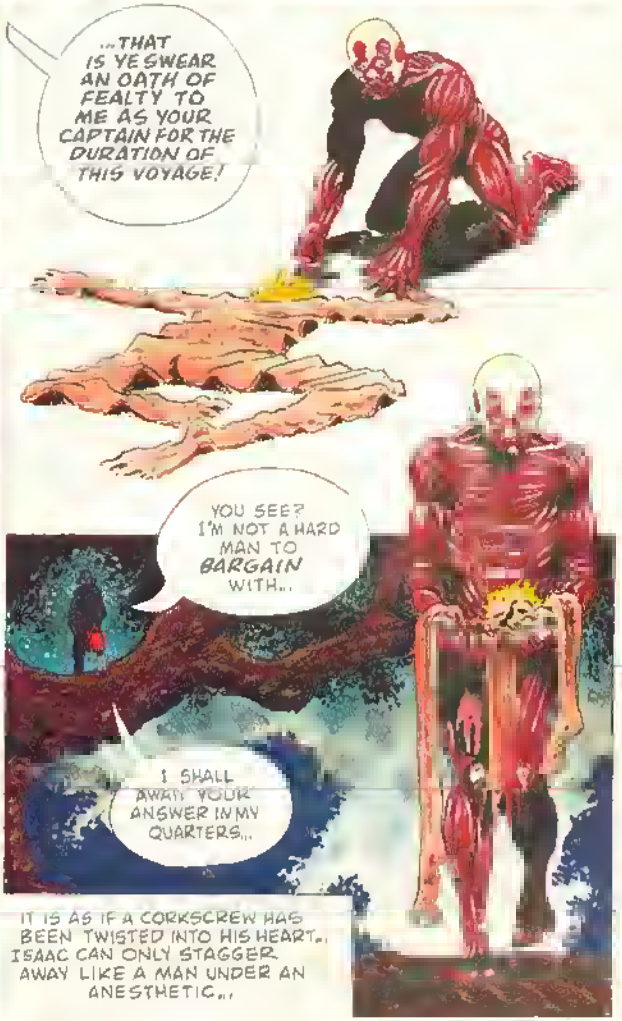
...THEN I'LL BE DAMNED IF THE SCIENTIST IN ME DOESN'T THINK IT MIGHT ACTUALLY BE WORTH IT!
BEST TO TRY AND PUT IT OUT OF MY MIND... IF I LET MYSELF THINK ABOUT IT I'LL ONLY GO MAD!
I HOPE I CAN LOCATE FALCO ON THIS CRAZY SHIP...
...IT SEEMS TO BE ONE HUGE PLANT WITH A SELF-CONTAINED ATMOSPHERE!
I'LL BET DIMES TO DONUTS THEY USE SOME FORM OF PHOTOSYNTHESIS FOR PROPULSION...
HUH?
AMMA COMMANDS --BRING FORTH THE INITIATE!!
INITIATE! CAN YOU UNDERSTAND MY WORDS?
YES. THE XLEXU TAUGHT ME MANY SUCH THINGS...
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
AMMA, GOD OF THE VOID, DEMANDS THAT THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET TRAVELLED BEYOND THE SPEED OF LIGHT, PROVE THEMSELVES WORTHY!
HE SO ORDAINS YOU MUST STAND TRIAL BY VACCUUM!

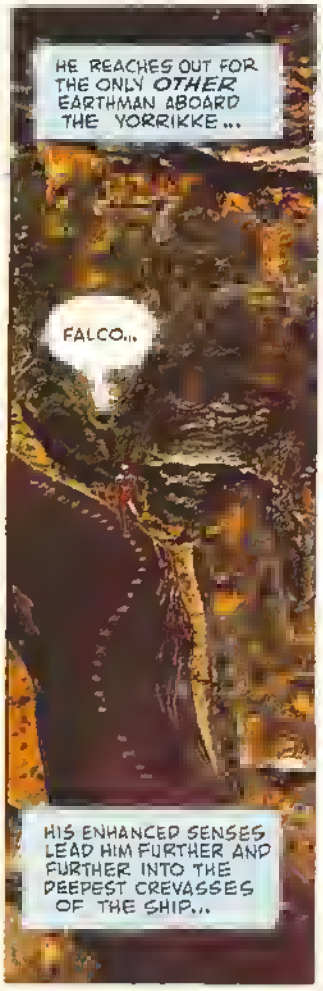
ISAAC ACTS INSTINCTIVELY TO PROTECT HIMSELF...
THIS IS SOME STUPID INITIATION MEANT TO INTIMIDATE ME...
HIS AURA RIPPLES INTO FOCUS AND EXPANDS RAPIDLY...
...NOT UNLIKE THE RITE OF PASSAGE I HAD TO ENDURE THE FIRST TIME I CROSSED THE EQUATOR!
WITH TERRIFYING RESULTS!
NEPTUNE'S COURT WAS NEVER LIKE THIS!
EXCELLENT EARTHMAN EXCELLENT
SO THIS IS THE FRUIT OF MY XLEXU'S LABORS?
ROTWANG!
MY SURGEON'S HANDIWORK NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME! IN FACT I WAS JUST ADMIRING THE JOB THEY DID ON YOUR FRIEND...
FALCO! WHERE IS HE?
HE'S FOLLOWING HIS CAPTAIN'S ORDERS LIKE A GOOD CREWMAN!
WOULD THAT YE'D TAKE A LESSON FROM HIM...
DON'T TAUNT ME, ROTWANG! I'LL NEVER SERVE UNDER A KILLER LIKE YOU!
YOU MURDERED OVER A HUNDRED GOOD MEN WHEN YOU SHANGHAIED US..
THE ONLY DEBT I OWE YOU IS ONE OF VENGEANCE!

RECONSIDER, EARTHMAN...
WE NEED YE FOR THAT MARVELOUS DOUBLE BRAIN AND WHAT IT CAN TELL US!
WELL, I DONT NEED YOU!

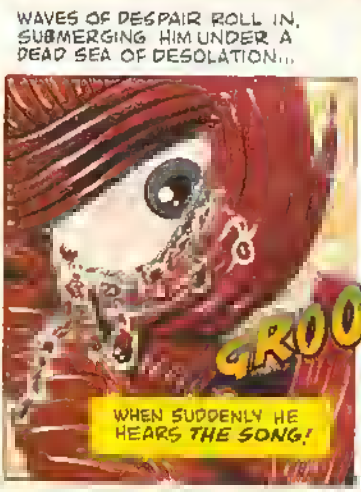
THINK AGAIN--THERE IS SOMETHING I POSSESS THAT YE ARE SADLY LACKING IN...
SOMETHING I SUSPECT YE DESIRE VERY MUCH!
OH YEAH? WHAT IS IT?

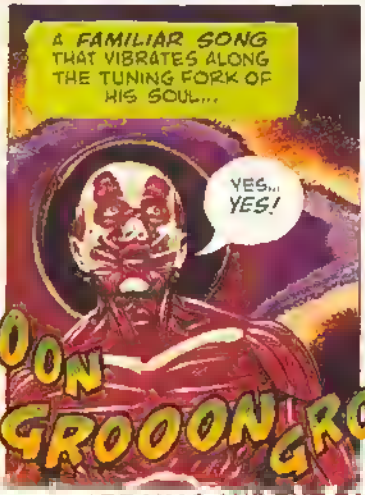

THIS!
I WILL ORDER THE XLEXU TO SEW IT BACK UPON THEE ONLY IF YE FULFILL ONE CONDITION!


...THAT IS YE SWEAR AN OATH OF FEALTY TO ME AS YOUR CAPTAIN FOR THE DURATION OF THIS VOYAGE!
YOU SEE? I'M NOT A HARD MAN TO BARGAIN WITH...
I SHALL AWAIT YOUR ANSWER IN MY QUARTERS...
IT IS AS IF A CORKSCREW HAS BEEN TWISTED INTO HIS HEART.. ISAAC CAN ONLY STAGGER AWAY LIKE A MAN UNDER AN ANESTHETIC...


HE REACHES OUT FOR THE ONLY OTHER EARTHMAN ABOARD THE YORRIKKE...
FALCO...
HIS ENHANCED SENSES LEAD HIM FURTHER AND FURTHER INTO THE DEEPEST CREVASSES OF THE SHIP...

FINALLY HE IS DRAWN TO THE CHAMBER CONTAINING THE GRAVITY ROOT, AND THE BOILERS USED TO CONTROL IT...
FALCO...?
IT IS HERE HE LEARNS THE TRUE MEANING OF GRIEF...
F-FALCO.





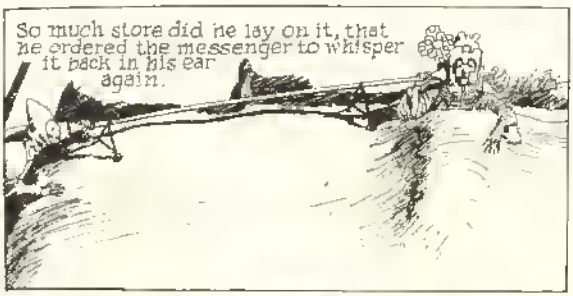
FOR THE YORRIKKE IS APPROACHING THE WHALE PLANET...
I--I HEAR YOU!
...AND THE SYMPHONY OF THE WHALES IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY CLEAR!
GROOON
BAROOOM

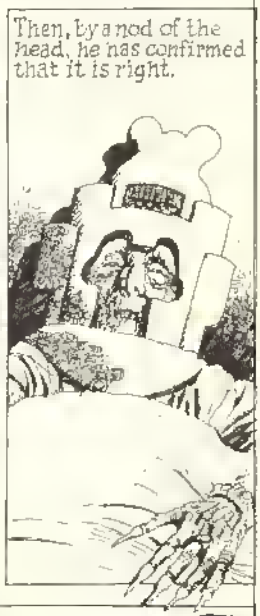
ABRAXAS AND THE EARTHMAN continues next issue.

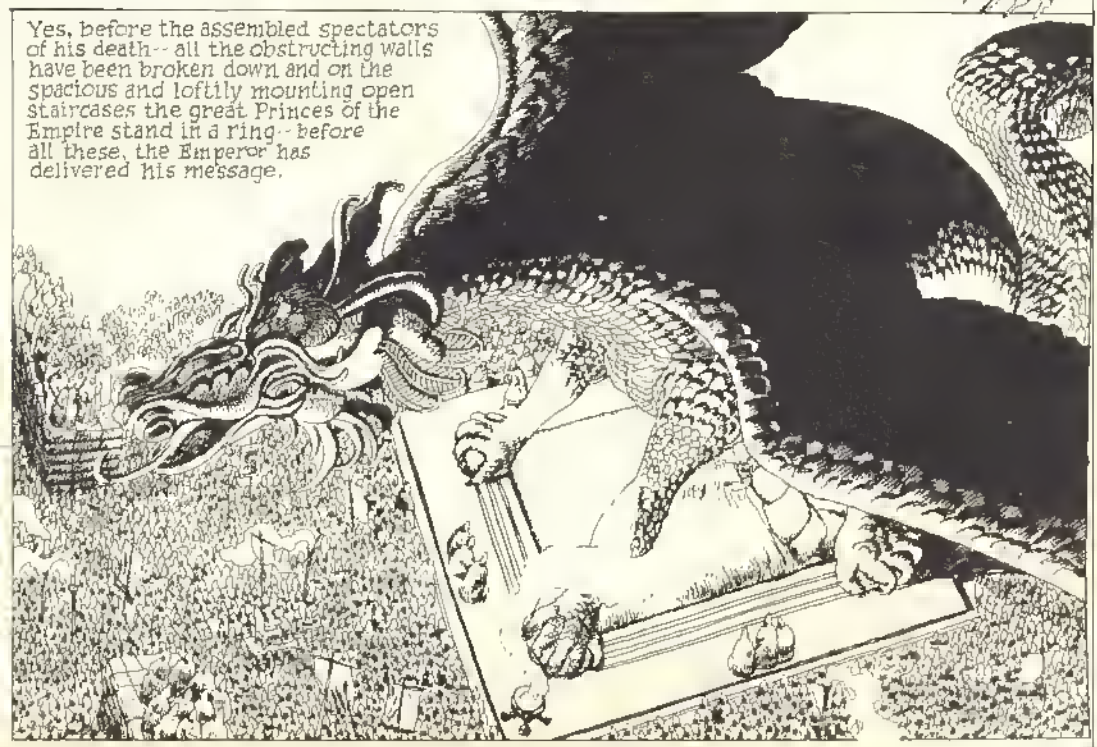
AN IMPERIAL MESSAGE

by Franz Kafka
adaptation by Leopoldo Duranona

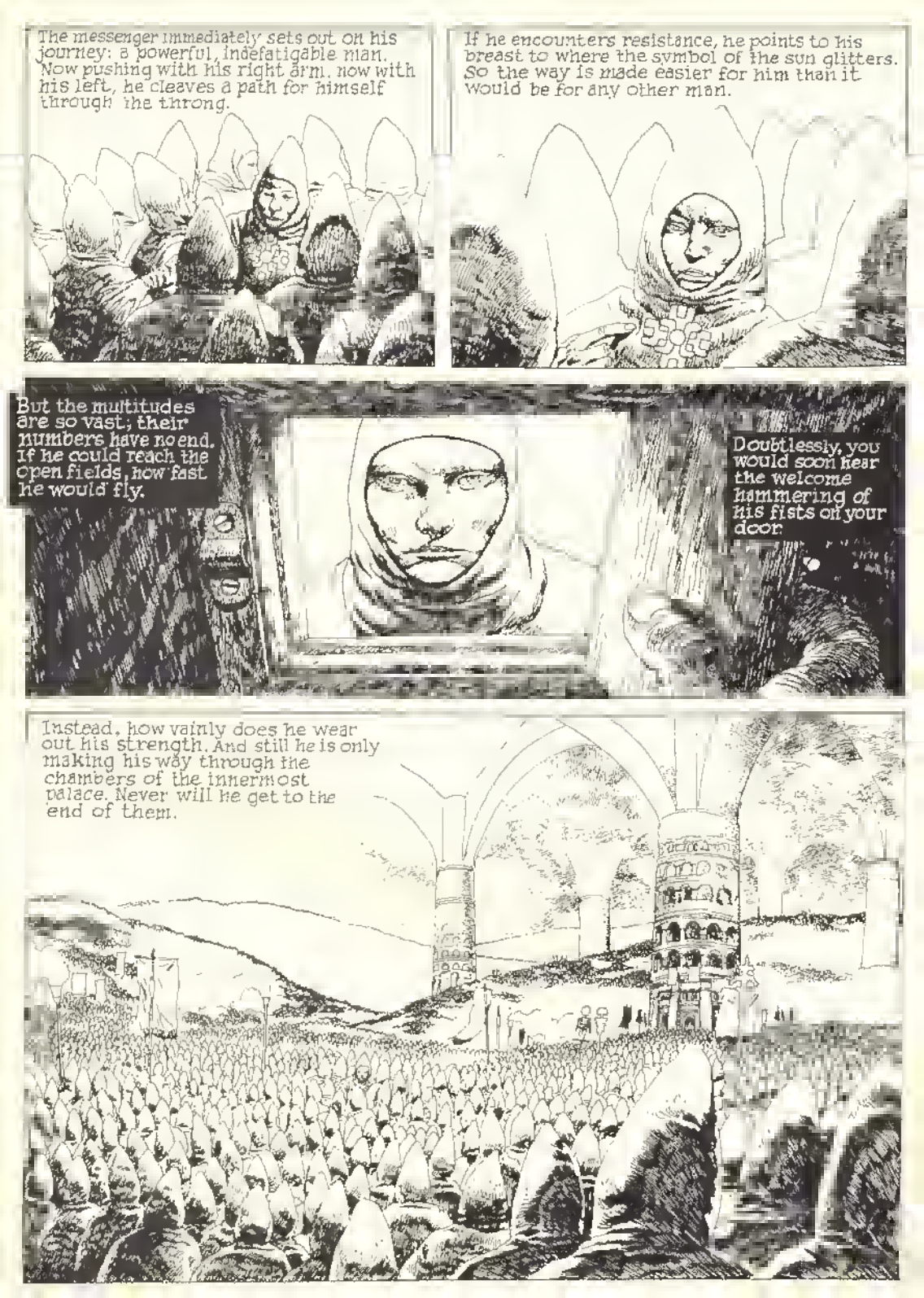
The Emperor has sent a message to you, the humble subject, the insignificant shadow cowering in the remotest distance from the Imperial sun.

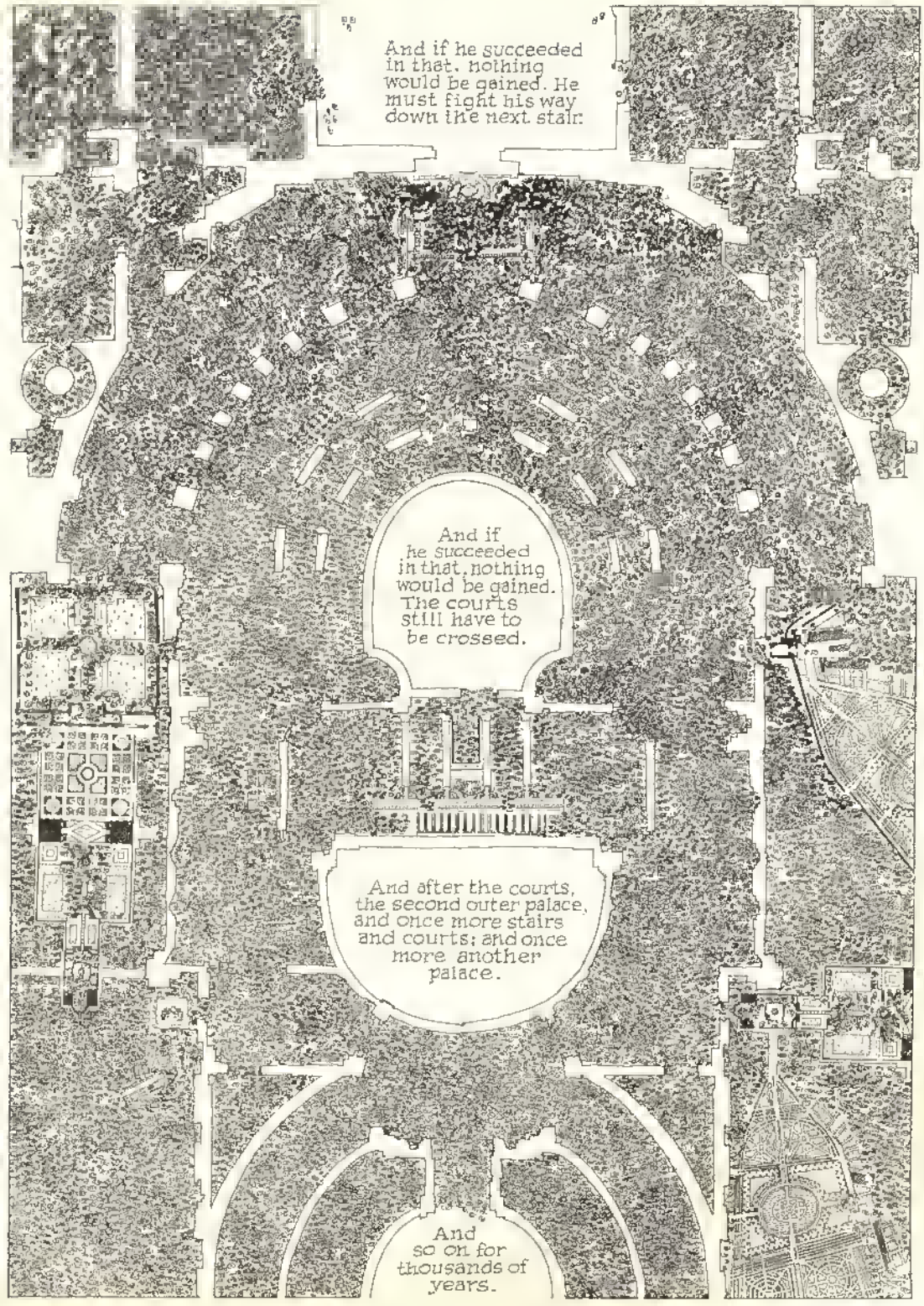


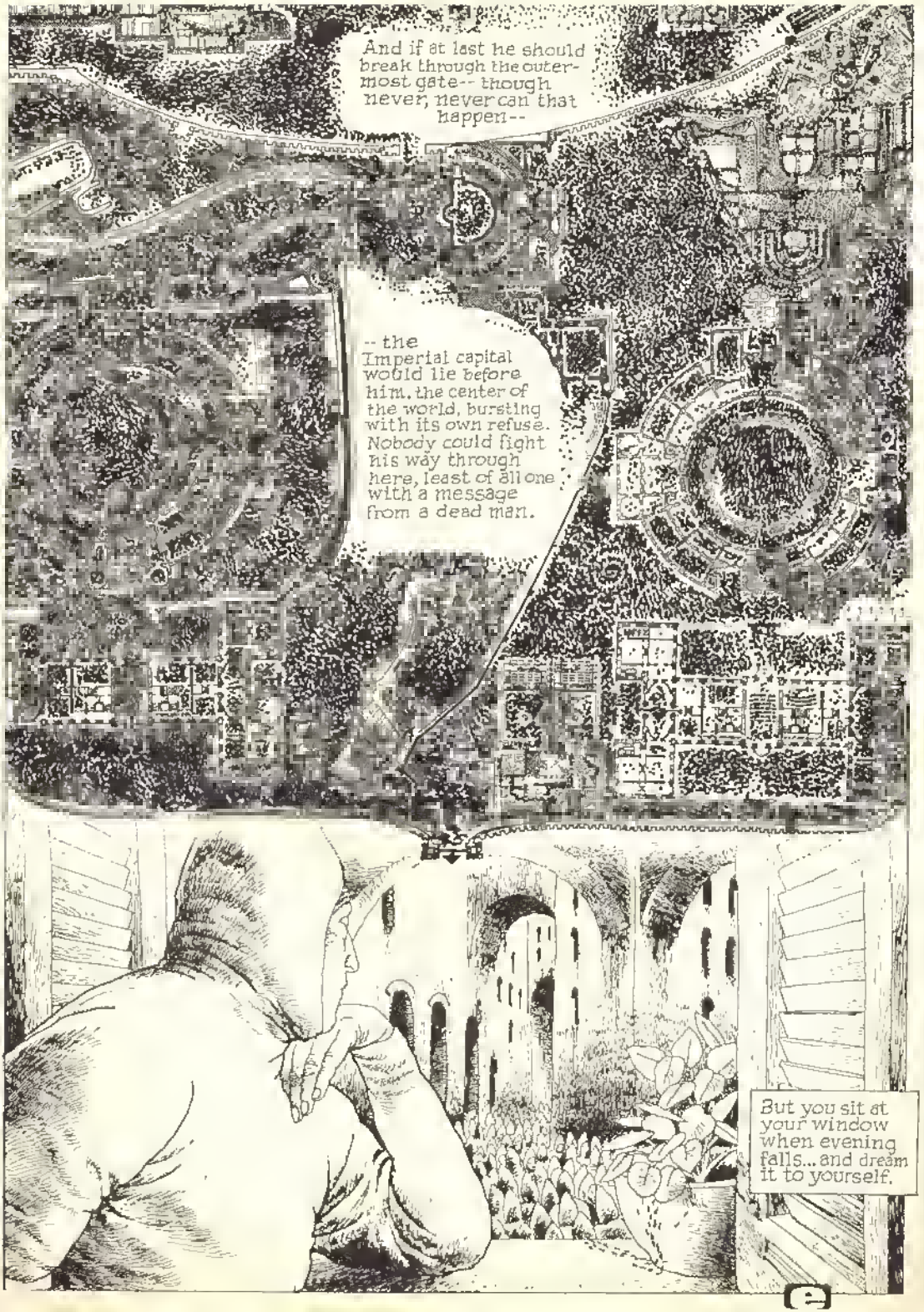



Yes, before the assembled spectators of his death -- all the obstructing walls have been broken down and on the spacious and loftily mounting open staircases the great Princes of the Empire stand in a ring -- before all these, the Emperor has delivered his message.

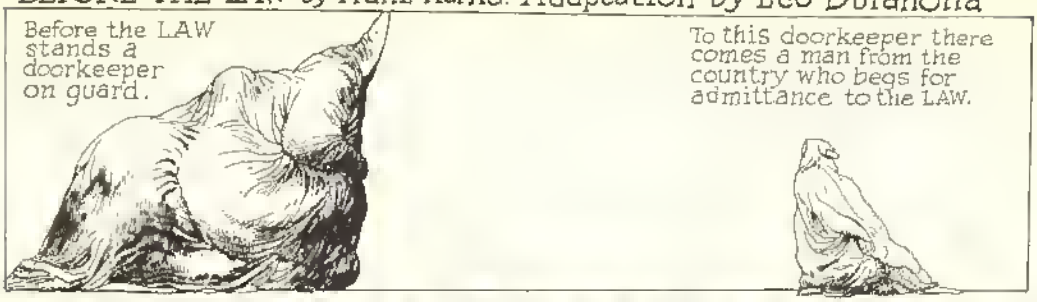
©1982 Leo Duranona Adapted from the original story "An Imperial Message" by Franz Kafka

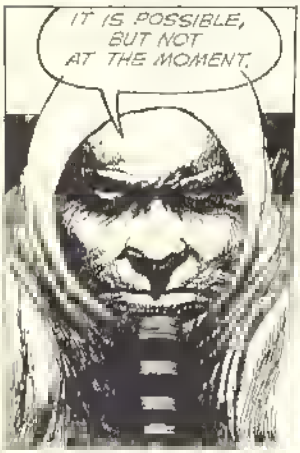

The messenger immediately sets out on his journey: a powerful, indefatigable man. Now pushing with his right arm, now with his left, he cleaves a path for himself through the throng.
If he encounters resistance, he points to his breast to where the symbol of the sun glitters. So the way is made easier for him than it would be for any other man.
But the multitudes are so vast; their numbers have no end. If he could reach the open fields, how fast he would fly.
Doubtlessly, you would soon hear the welcome hammering of his fists on your door.
Instead, how vainly does he wear out his strength. And still he is only making his way through the chambers of the innermost palace. Never will he get to the end of them.


And if he succeeded in that, nothing would be gained. He must fight his way down the next stair.
And if he succeeded in that, nothing would be gained. The courts still have to be crossed.
And after the courts, the second outer palace, and once more stairs and courts; and once more another palace.
And so on for thousands of years.

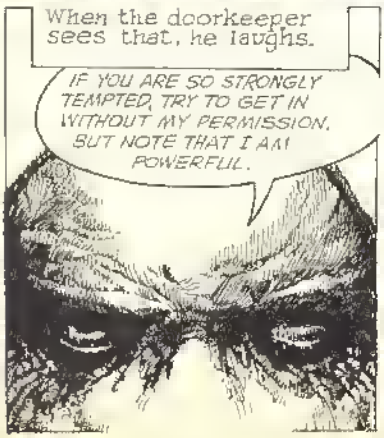

And if at last he should break through the outermost gate-- though never, never can that happen--
-- the Imperial capital would lie before him, the center of the world, bursting with its own refuse. Nobody could fight his way through here, least of all one with a message from a dead man.
But you sit at your window when evening falls... and dream it to yourself.

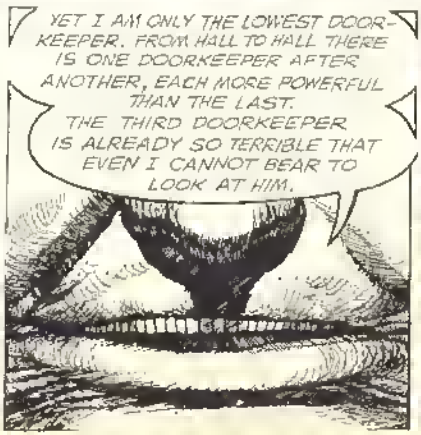
BEFORE THE LAW by Franz Kafka. Adaptation by Leo Duranona

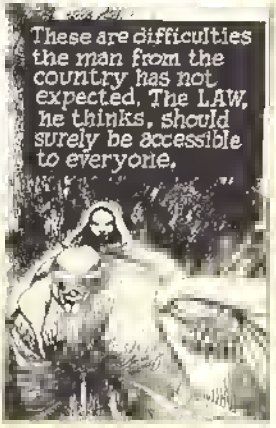

Before the LAW stands a doorkeeper on guard.
To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country who begs for admittance to the LAW.



Since the gateway stands open as usual and the doorkeeper steps to one side...
...the man bends down to peer through the entrance.


When the doorkeeper sees that, he laughs.
IF YOU ARE SO STRONGLY TEMPTED, TRY TO GET IN WITHOUT MY PERMISSION. BUT NOTE THAT I AM POWERFUL.


YET I AM ONLY THE LOWEST DOOR-KEEPER. FROM HALL TO HALL THERE IS ONE DOORKEEPER AFTER ANOTHER, EACH MORE POWERFUL THAN THE LAST. THE THIRD DOORKEEPER IS ALREADY SO TERRIBLE THAT EVEN I CANNOT BEAR TO LOOK AT HIM.


These are difficulties the man from the country has not expected. The LAW, he thinks, should surely be accessible to everyone.

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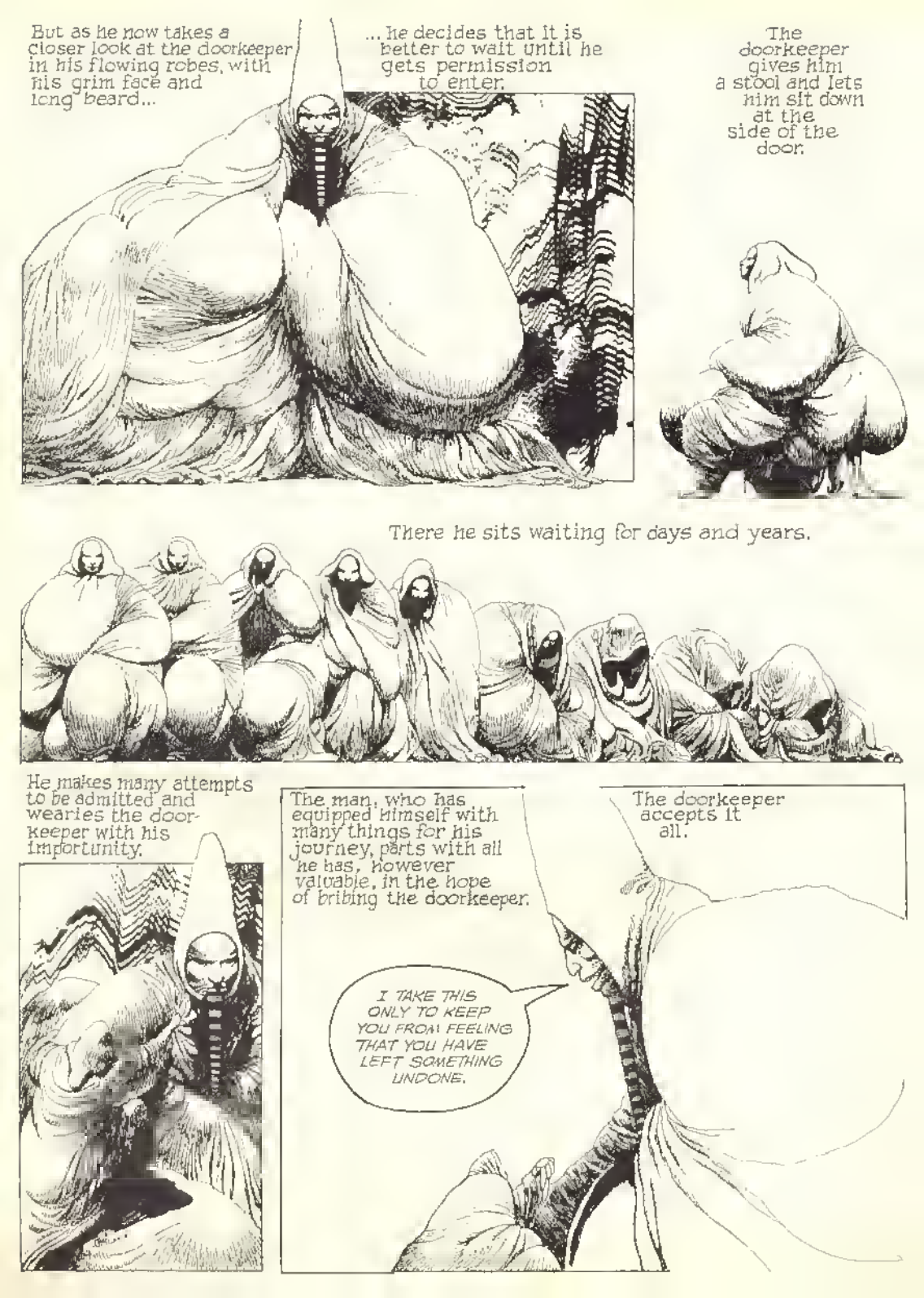
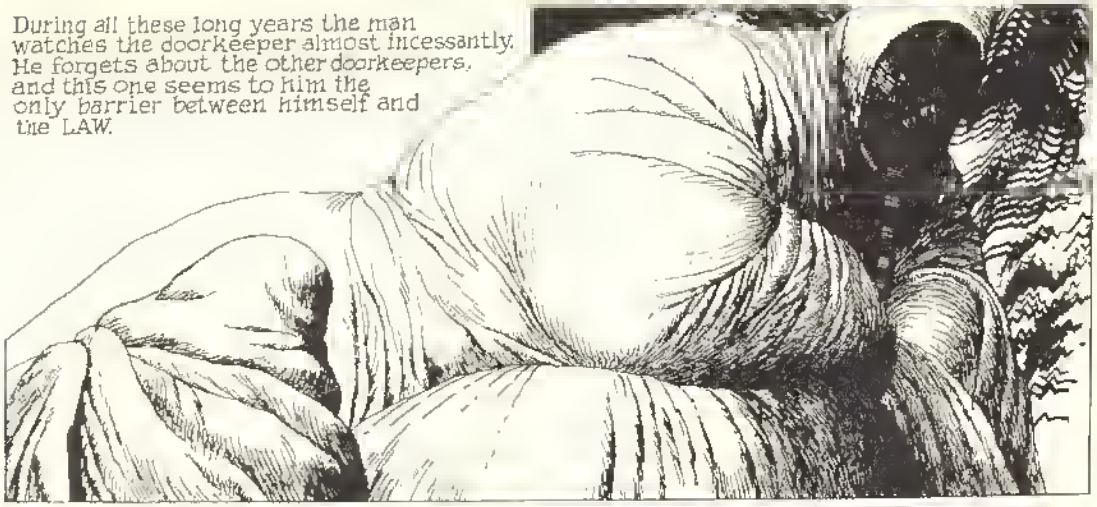

But as he now takes a closer look at the doorkeeper in his flowing robes, with his grim face and long beard...
... he decides that it is better to wait until he gets permission to enter.
The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at the side of the door.
There he sits waiting for days and years.
He makes many attempts to be admitted and wearies the doorkeeper with his importunity.
The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, parts with all he has, however valuable, in the hope of bribing the doorkeeper.
The doorkeeper accepts it all.
I TAKE THIS ONLY TO KEEP YOU FROM FEELING THAT YOU HAVE LEFT SOMETHING UNDONE.

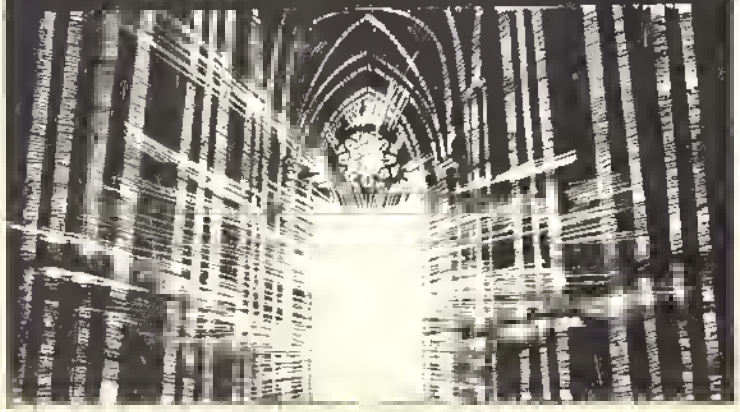
During all these long years the man watches the doorkeeper almost incessantly. He forgets about the other doorkeepers, and this one seems to him the only barrier between himself and the LAW.



In the early years, he curses his evil fate boldly and loudly. Later, as he grows old, he mutters only to himself.

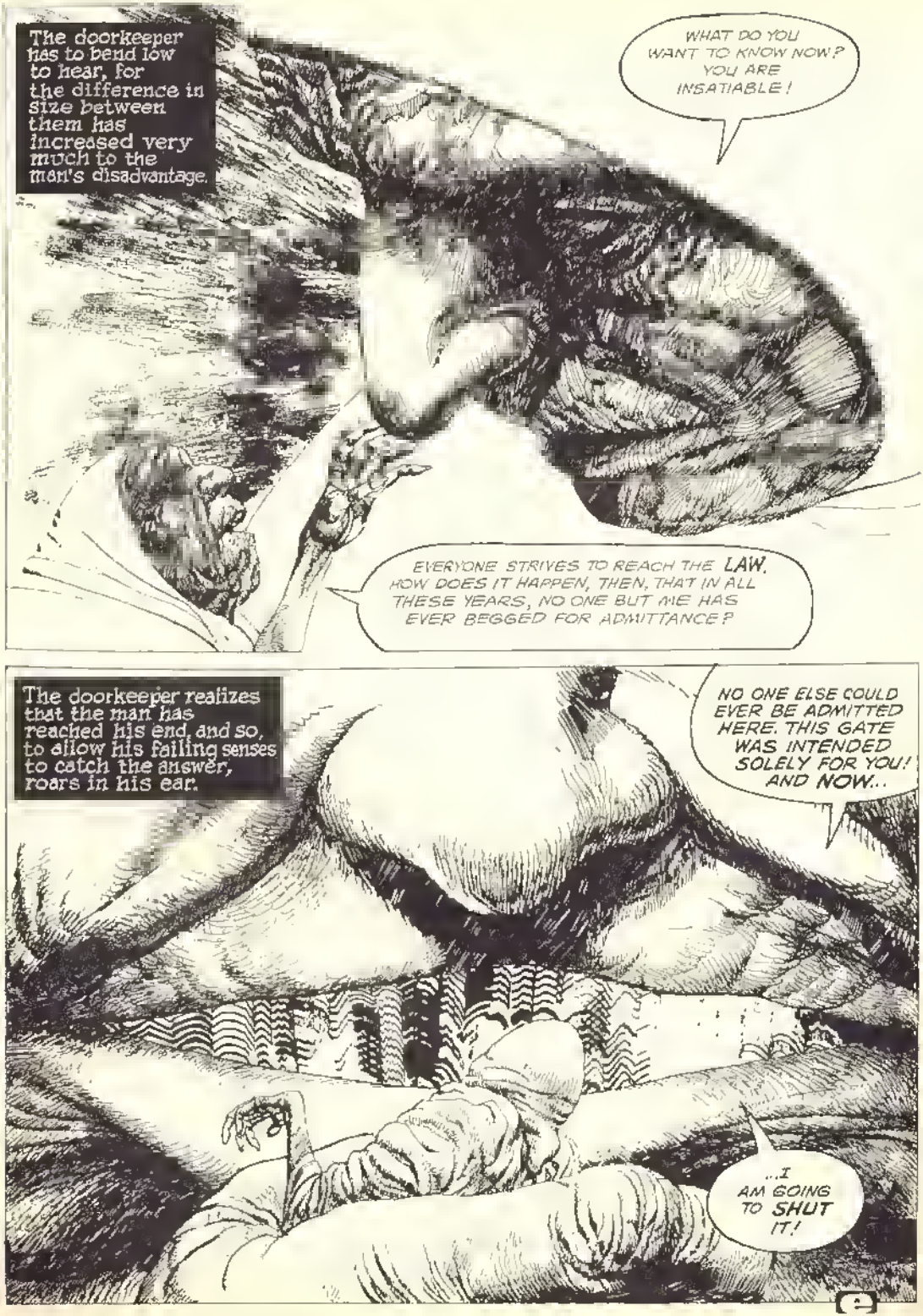
He grows childish, and since in his prolonged watch he has learned to know even the fleas in the doorkeeper's collar, he begs the very fleas to help him persuade the doorkeeper to change his mind.

Finally his eyes grow dim and he does not know whether the world is darkening around him or his eyes are only deceiving him. But in the darkness, he can now perceive a radiance that streams immortally from the door of the LAW.



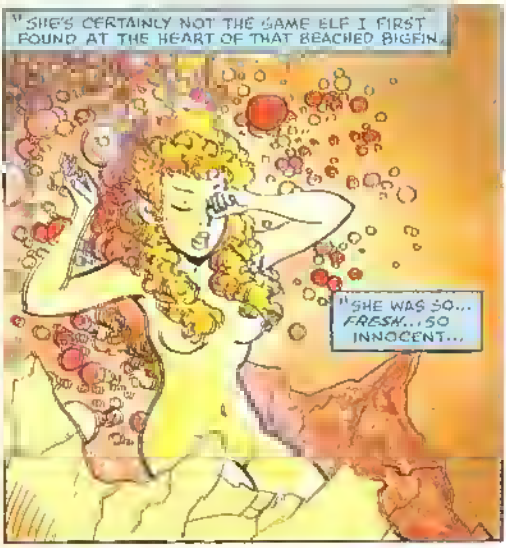
Now his life is drawing to a close. Before he dies, all that he has experienced during his long sojourn condenses in his mind to one question.

He beckons to the doorkeeper since he can barely raise his aged body.

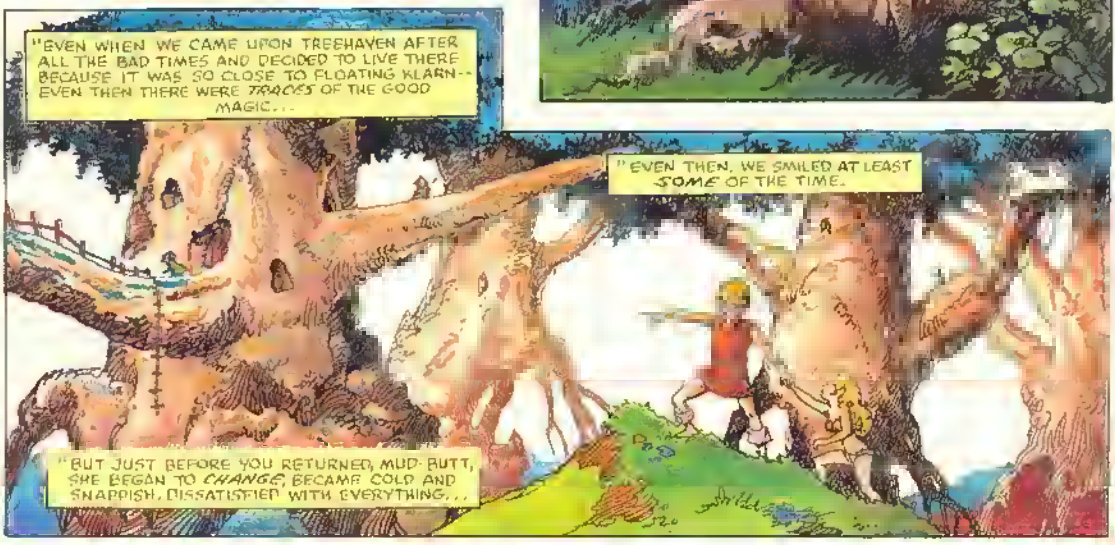

The doorkeeper has to bend low to hear, for the difference in size between them has increased very much to the man's disadvantage.
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW NOW? YOU ARE INSATIABLE!
EVERYONE STRIVES TO REACH THE LAW. HOW DOES IT HAPPEN, THEN, THAT IN ALL THESE YEARS, NO ONE BUT ME HAS EVER BEGGED FOR ADMITTANCE?
The doorkeeper realizes that the man has reached his end, and so, to allow his failing senses to catch the answer, roars in his ear.
NO ONE ELSE COULD EVER BE ADMITTED HERE. THIS GATE WAS INTENDED SOLELY FOR YOU! AND NOW...
...I AM GOING TO SHUT IT!

PART 2
JOURNEY TO SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN
WELL, THERE IT IS -- SEE HOW THE VERY TOP HOOKS OVER? THAT PROVES IT'S SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN.
AND IT'S ABOUT TIME! WE'VE BEEN RIDING FOR DAYS THROUGH SWAMPS AND JUNGLES AND DESERTS -- AND ALL TO REACH A STUPID, SKINNY PILE OF ROCK!
EASY, VELANNA -- NO NEED TO SNAP AT MUD-BUTT. BESIDES, YOU'RE THE ONE WHO WANTED TO LEAVE TREEHAVEN AND GO ON THIS JOURNEY...
THAT'S RIGHT, SISTER -- SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN MAY NOT LOOK LIKE MUCH, BUT JUST BEAR ONE THOUGHT IN THAT SAUCY ELF HEAD OF YOURS...
IT COULD HOLD THE ONLY SALVATION THAT'LL KEEP WEIRD-WORLD FROM BEIN' SWALLOWED WHOLE BY EVIL!

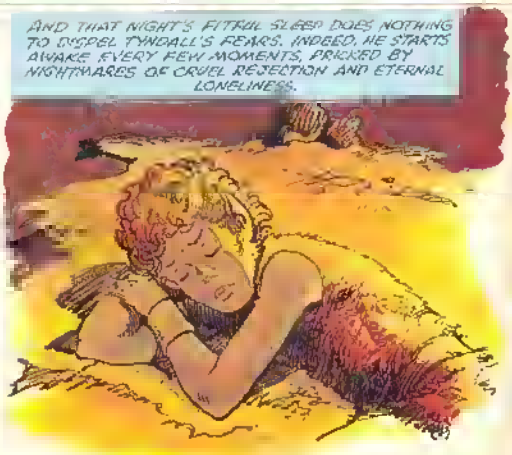
OH? AND YOU JUST BEAR THIS THOUGHT IN THAT THICK DWARF HEAD OF YOURS, MUD-BUTT...
THE ONLY EVIL I'VE EXPERIENCED SO FAR HAS BEEN SHARING THIS "JOURNEY" WITH YOU AND PATHETIC TYNDALL!
WAGGLE YER TONGUE AND DROOL VENOM ALL YA WANT, SISTER, BUT I'M TELLIN' YA THERE'S A BIG EVIL ON THE LAND!
I SAW PLENTY OF IT ON MY WAY TO TREEHAVEN-- LAKES BOILIN,' ROCKS RAININ' FROM THE SKY, MOTHERS TOSSIN' THEIR BABES INTO COOKPOTS...
WE SAW SOME OF IT TOO, 'LANNA— DON'T FORGET THAT DRAGON ATTACK JUST BEFORE WE LEFT TREEHAVEN...
HAH! SOME EVIL-- IF EVEN YOU COULD STOP IT BY CROONING A STUPID SONG!
NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I FEEL AN URGENT NEED TO BE ANYWHERE BUT IN THE COMPANY OF TWO NAIVE OAFS!
VELANNA!
AW, LET HER GO, TYNDALL-- A FASTER PACE WON'T HURT US OR THE CLOPPERS.
WE GOTTA GET TO THE WIZARD OF SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN FAST ANYWAY-- AND COVERIN' MORE GROUND BEFORE LIGHTIN' THE CAMPFIRE AIN'T A BAD IDEA.
BUT SHE'S SO DIFFERENT NOW, MUD-BUTT, SO SHORT TEMPERED...
I SWEAR SHE'S FORGOTTEN HOW TO SMILE!


"SHE'S CERTAINLY NOT THE GAME ELF I FIRST FOUND AT THE HEART OF THAT BEACHED BIGFIN.
"SHE WAS SO... FRESH... SO INNOCENT...

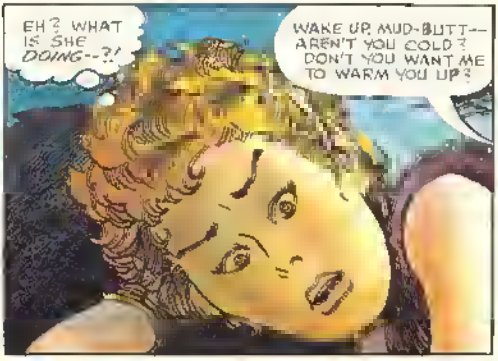
"...AND IT WAS SO MUCH *BETTER* THEN, FOR BOTH OF US. THE MAGIC WAS GOOD, THE BLUE SOUL OF EVERY BREEZE AND THE RED KISS OF EVERY SUNSET... AND WE SMILED *ALL THE TIME.*
"WE WERE JUST SO GLAD TO BE *ALIVE TOGETHER.*


"EVEN WHEN WE CAME UPON TREEHAVEN AFTER ALL THE BAD TIMES AND DECIDED TO LIVE THERE BECAUSE IT WAS SO CLOSE TO FLOATING KLARN-- EVEN THEN THERE WERE *TRACES* OF THE GOOD MAGIC...
"EVEN THEN, WE SMILED AT LEAST *SOME* OF THE TIME.
"BUT JUST BEFORE YOU RETURNED, MUD-BUTT, SHE BEGAN TO *CHANGE*, BECAME COLD AND SNAPPISH, DISSATISFIED WITH EVERYTHING...

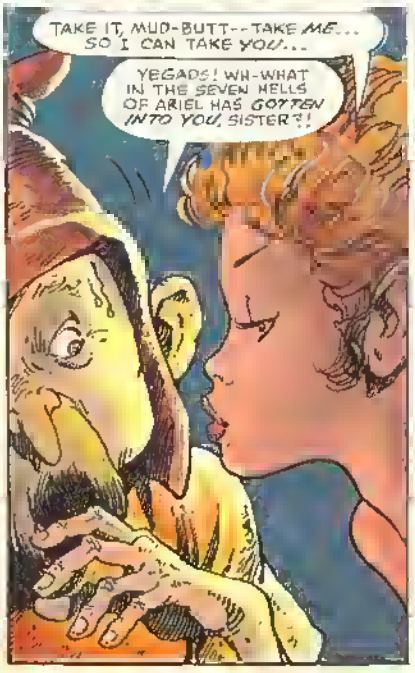
AND TRY AS I MIGHT, I CAN'T GET HER BACK, CAN'T RESTORE THE PAST...
AND I'M AFRAID-- TERRIFIED-- THAT I'M *LOSING HER FOREVER.*


AND THAT NIGHT'S FITFUL SLEEP DOES NOTHING TO DISPEL TYNDALL'S FEARS. INDEED, HE STARTS AWAKE EVERY FEW MOMENTS, PRICKED BY NIGHTMARES OF CRUEL REJECTION AND ETERNAL LONELINESS.

AND EACH TIME HE AWAKENS, THE REALITY IS WORSE, FOR THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THEM HAS BECOME A BRIDGELESS GULF...
VELANNA NO LONGER EVEN SLEEPS NEAR HIM.
MUD-BUTT-- WAKE UP.


EH? WHAT IS SHE DOING--?!
WAKE UP, MUD-BUTT-- AREN'T YOU COLD? DON'T YOU WANT ME TO WARM YOU UP?

HUH? WHUZZAT?
IT'S ME, MUD-BUTT... ALL OF ME. DON'T YOU WANT IT?


TAKE IT, MUD-BUTT--TAKE ME... SO I CAN TAKE YOU...
YEGADS! WH-WHAT IN THE SEVEN HELLS OF ARIEL HAS GOTTEN INTO YOU, SISTER?!

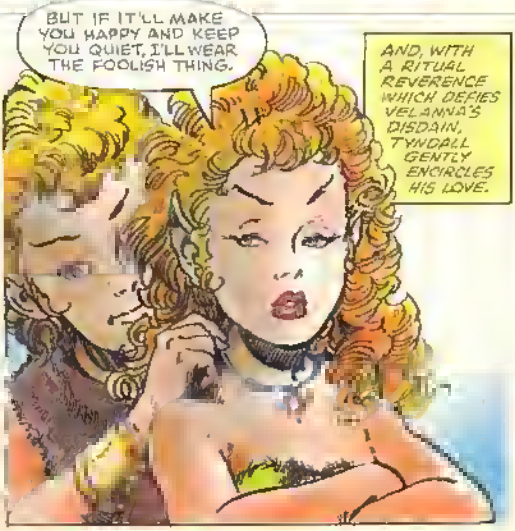
MATURITY, MUD-BUTT... DESIRE... NEED.
B-BUT... BUT YOU... I MEAN, WHAT ABOUT TYNDALL?
TYNDALL IS A CHILD. YOU'RE MATURE, MUD-BUTT... OLDER... MORE EXPERIENCED...

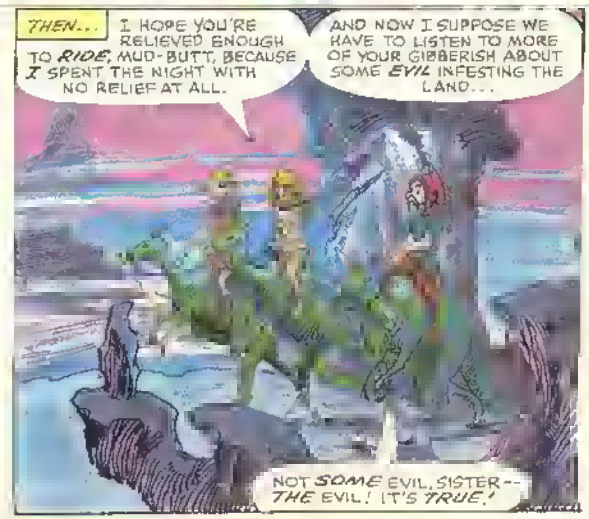
MAYBE SO, BUT I... UH... I-- TYNDALL!
OH, KREEBLES, HE'S GONE!
UH, LISTEN, SISTER, I TOOK A VOW OF CELIBACY, YA SEE, AND... AND...
...AND BESIDES, I GOTTA GO RELIEVE MYSELF! BAD! FAST!
AND WHAT? LEMME SEE, LEMME THINK-- QUICK!
AND...
MUD-BUTT!
WHY, YOU LOUSY FAKE! SOME WORLDLY-WISE, LOVER YOU ARE!
AT ANY OTHER TIME, THOSE WOULD BE FIGHTING WORDS -- BUT NOW, GRIEVOUSLY UNNERVED, MUD-BUTT HOTFOOTS IT TO THE RIVER, BELLOWING ALL THE WAY...
TYNDALL! TYNDALL!
YEAH, MUD-BUTT... I'M HERE.
LOOK, I... UH... I DON'T KNOW HOW TO TELL YA THIS, TWIT...
I MEAN, I DON'T EVEN WANNA TELL YA, BUT I THINK I BETTER! I MEAN, I MAY NOT BE THE MOST NOBLE DWARF ON WEIRDWORLD, BUT I GOT MY LIMITS, YA KNOW WHAT I MEAN?
AND VELANNA-- YOU KNOW VELANNA-- THE ELF... LIKE YOU? WELL, SHE... UH... SHE BUTT... UM...
I KNOW, MUD-BUTT. THANKS FOR TELLING ME... BUT I SAW.
OH.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, MUD-BUTT! SHE'S CHANGING-- SHE'S NOT EVEN VELANNA ANYMORE! AND SHE'S GETTING WORSE EVERY DAY-- EVERY MOMENT!

IT'S THE EVIL ON THE LAND--SOMEHOW IT'S EVEN AFFECTING HER. WE GOTTA STICK TOGETHER AND FIGHT IT, TYN, BEFORE YOU LOSE HER--AND BEFORE WEIRDWORLD LOSES EVERYTHING.
I...I'M GOING TO TRY ONCE MORE IN THE MORNING MUD-BUTT... ONE MORE TRY TO GET THROUGH TO HER...TO HOLD ONTO HER...
...AND IF IT DOESN'T WORK I'VE LOST HER--I KNOW IT

MORNING...
'LANNA? I...I'VE GOT SOMETHING FOR YOU...
WHAT NOW?
REMEMBER THE SHRINE I ERECTED AT TREEHAVEN--THE ONE YOU WEREN'T IN THE MOOD TO LIKE?

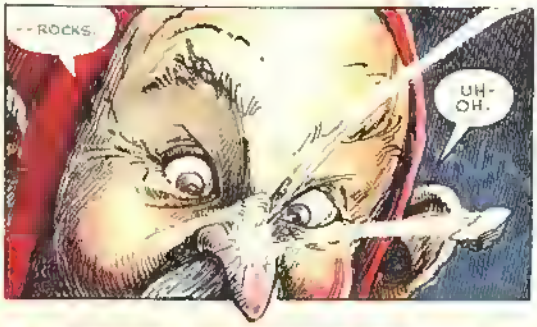
WELL, I SAVED A FEW BITS OF IT TO MAKE A CHARM FOR YOU... A TALISMAN...
AS LONG AS YOU WEAR IT, WE'LL BE TOGETHER AND EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE--I JUST KNOW IT.
WILL YOU WEAR IT, 'LANNA? IT...IT MEANS A LOT TO ME...
NO DOUBT IT DOES. CHILDISH NONSENSE ALWAYS MEANS A LOT TO YOU.


BUT IF IT'LL MAKE YOU HAPPY AND KEEP YOU QUIET, I'LL WEAR THE FOOLISH THING.
AND, WITH A RITUAL REVERENCE WHICH DEFIES VELANNA'S DISDAIN, TYNDALL GENTLY ENCIRCLES HIS LOVE.


THEN...
I HOPE YOU'RE RELIEVED ENOUGH TO RIDE, MUD-BUTT, BECAUSE I SPENT THE NIGHT WITH NO RELIEF AT ALL.
AND NOW I SUPPOSE WE HAVE TO LISTEN TO MORE OF YOUR GIBBERISH ABOUT SOME EVIL INFESTING THE LAND...
NOT SOME EVIL, SISTER--THE EVIL! IT'S TRUE!

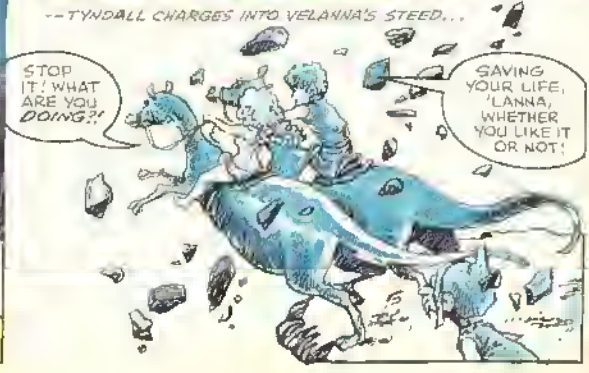
ALL KINDS OF NONSENSICAL DISASTERS HAVE BEEN HAPPENING -- AS IF NATURE HERSELF HAS DECIDED TO DRESS IN DARKNESS.
IT HAPPENS LIKE THIS -- CLOUDS GATHER SUDDENLY, WITHOUT WARNING...

...AND LIGHTNING FLARES AND CRASHES AND SHAKES THE GROUND AND...
KREEBLES! GETTIN' DIM AWFUL QUICK, AIN'T IT?
...AND THEN THE STORM BEGIN... STORMS OF--


-- ROCKS.
UH-OH.

BY THE DWARF MOTHER'S HAIRY TEAT, I DIDN'T MEAN IT! I'LL CHANGE -- I SWEAR IT!
HURRY -- HEAD BACK FOR THE RIVER! WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF THIS STORM BEFORE IT CRUSHES US!

SOON, REACHING THE VERY ESCARPMENT FROM WHICH TYNDALL WEPT INTO THE RIVER THE NIGHT BEFORE...
JUMP! STAY UNDERWATER AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE!
YOU'RE MAD! THERE'S A FLASH-FLOOD DOWN THERE! BESIDES, WE CAN'T MAKE A JUMP FROM THIS HEIGHT!
WE'VE GOT TO!!
AND WITHOUT FURTHER COMMENT--


--TYNDALL CHARGES INTO VELANNA'S STEED...
STOP IT! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
SAVING YOUR LIFE, 'LANNA, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT!

COME ON, MUD-BUTT!
WHOOOAAA! LOOK OUT BELOW!
THEY PLUNGE INTO THE INEXPLICABLY FRIGID WATERS--SAFE, AT LEAST, FROM THE PELTING FURY OF ROCKS...
...BUT CAUGHT IN THE FLOODING RIVER'S PRETERNATURALLY SWIFT EMBRACE.
IT RIPS THEM ALONG, TUMBLING OVER JAGGED ROCKS AND GUSHING FALLS, THROUGH SUBMERGED TUNNELS AND GROTTOS, UNTIL THEY FEEL DROWNED A DOZEN TIMES.
BUT ALWAYS, SEEMINGLY AT THE LAST POSSIBLE SECOND, THEY MANAGE TO BREAK THE SURFACE FOR ANOTHER LIFE-SAVING GASP OF AIR--AND SO IT GOES THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE ENDLESS DAY...
...UNTIL, DIZZY, BONE-WEARY AND SPENT, THEY ARE FINALLY SPIT UPON A ROCKY SHORE.
AT...AT LEAST THE ROCK-STORM'S OVER, TWIT...
...AND THE FLOOD WASHED US CLOSER TO SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN... GOOD THING, TOO, CUZ WE LOST OUR CLOPPER-STEEDS...
D-DON'T TALK, MUD-BUTT...JUST ...RESSST...

SOMETIME LATER, NEAR TWILIGHT, WHEN SHADOWS GROW LONGER... AND MORE MENACING...
THIS ONE NOT FOR COOK-COOKING. THIS ONE FOR SAVING...
...FOR SHREEKAR, MIGHTY CHIEFTAIN OF THE GOBLIN HORDE.
YOUNG AND RIPE AND SMOOTH-SO-SMOOTH! AYE, THIS ONE LIE IN MY HAUNT FOR MANY SEASONS!
HEH-HEH-HEH... SHREEKAR HAS FOUND HIMSELF FLESH-NOT-FOR-EATING.
WH-WHAT...? A MAN--?
HAH! YOU SEE? SHE WILL EVEN ENJOY IT... BUT NOT TOO MUCH, I HOPE, SHREEKAR DOESN'T LIKE IT WHEN THEY--
--OOOPH!
GET AWAY FROM HER!

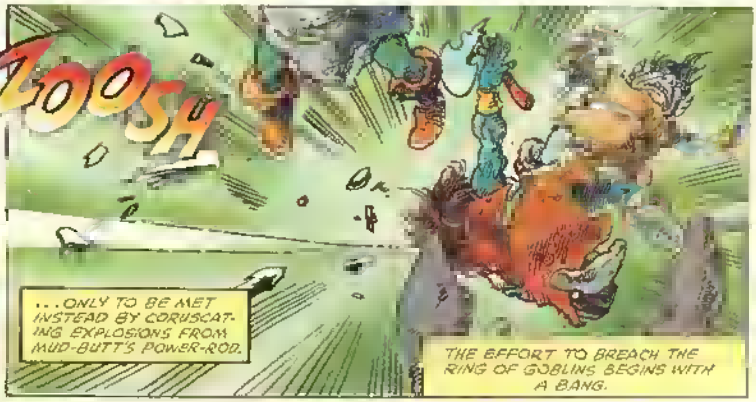
HEY! WHAT ARE YOU--?
HAH! I'LL TAKE THIS SWORD, BRUTE!
MMMPH!
JUST STAY BEHIND ME, VELANNA!
I DON'T CARE HOW MANY THERE ARE-- I'LL DEFEND YOU FROM EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM RIGHT UP TO MY DYING BREATH!
BUT AS THE SEETHING GOBLINS GATHER AND SLOWLY CONVERGE, EVEN VALIANT TYNDALL CAN SEE THE HOPELESSNESS OF HIS CAUSE...
THE TWIT'S DONE IT AGAIN-- AND HERE I'M S'POSED TO BE THE ONE WHO PICKS ALL THE FIGHTS!
THE POWER-ROD--WHERE'S THE POWER-ROD?! GOTTA FIND IT--
--BEFORE HE GETS OUR BONES TOSSED IN SOME REEKING GOBLIN STEW!
AN ELF-SO-SMALL, NO LESS! NOT EVEN A DWARF! AN ELF-- ATTACKING ME-- ATTACKING SHREEKAR, CHIEFTAIN OF THE GOBLIN HORDE!
RUE YOUR ACTIONS, PITIFUL ELF-SO-SMALL, FOR NOW YOU FACE DEATH-DEATH!
AHA! I KNEW I'D TUCKED THE THING AWAY SOMEWHERE!
ZOOSH
ZOOSH
ZOOSH
OUR BLADES SMASH-SHATTER.
YEAH, PRETTY NIFTY, AIN'T IT? DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, REALLY, BUT I CALL IT A POWER-ROD...
...AND IT WORKS JUST AS GOOD ON FLESH-- MAYBE EVEN BETTER.
HE MAY SPEAK TRUE-TRUTH!

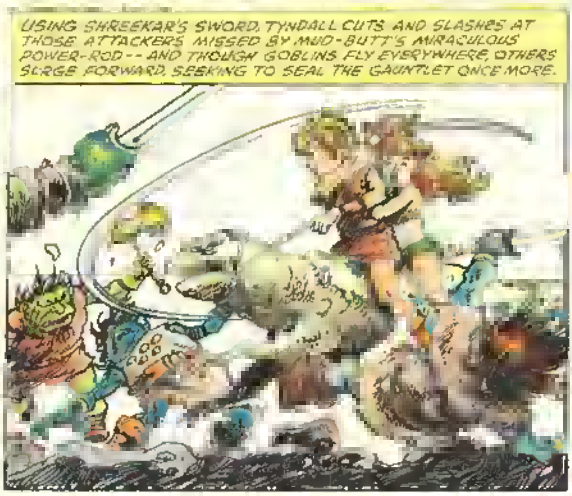
YOU BET I SPEAK TRUTH, YA MUD-UGLY GOBLIN-CREEPS!
NOW JUST STAY WHERE YA ARE-- WHILE WE SWIPE A COUPLE OF YOUR RIDICULOUS STEEDS TO GET US OUTTA HERE!
THE GOBLIN CHIEF IGNORES MUD-BUTT, GLARING INSTEAD STRAIGHT INTO TYNDALL'S EYES.
SHREEKAR WILL NOT FORGET THIS DARK DAY, ELF!
IN THE YEARS TO COME I'LL PROBABLY HAVE A FEW NIGHTMARES ABOUT IT MYSELF, SHREEKAR-- BUT RIGHT NOW I JUST WANT TO LIVE UNTIL TONIGHT'S SLEEP.
FAUGH! WHEN NEXT WE MEET, ELF, YOUR BLOOD SHALL SPILL-RED-FLOW!
AFTER THEM! CUT ESCAPE STOP DEAD!
NOT BAD, EH, TWIT! MUD-BUTT AND HIS TRUSTY POWER-ROD TO THE RESCUE ONCE AGAIN!
YEAH-- AND THESE LIZARD-STEEDS ARE A LOT FASTER THAN I EXPECTED...
BUT THEY'RE ALREADY COMING AFTER US, MUD-BUTT!
WHAT'D YA EXPECT, TWIT? YA WANT 'EM TO JUST STAND THERE AND WAVE GOODBYE?
NOW-- NO WAY THEY CAN CATCH US BEFORE WE REACH SKYHOOK--
--MOUNTAIN?
OH, NO--! THERE'S MORE OF THEM-- LOTS MORE!
AND IS IT MERELY TYNDALL'S IMAGINATION-- OR DOES VELANNA ACTUALLY CHUCKLE AT THE SIGHT...?

THEY...THEY'VE GOT SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN COMPLETELY SURROUNDED--UNDER SIEGE--HUNDREDS OF THEM--THOUSANDS!
WHAT DO WE DO NOW?!

WE GOT NO CHOICE, TWIT! THEIR CHIEF'S COMIN' UP ON US FAST!
NOTHIN' TO DO BUT OUTRACE THE ONES BEHIND US AND CUT A SWATH THROUGH THE ONES IN FRONT OF US!

COME ON! WE'VE GOT TO REACH THE WIZARD OF SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN!!
INSTANTLY, THE BESIEGING GOBLINS GIRD THEMSELVES FOR WHAT PROMISES TO BE A PATHETIC CHARGE...

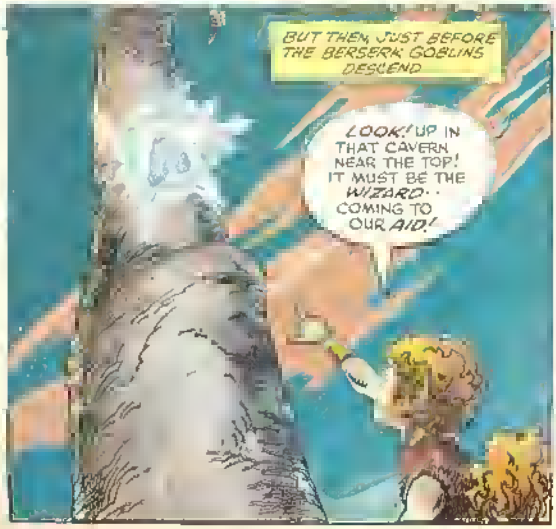

ZOOSH
...ONLY TO BE MET INSTEAD BY CORUSCATING EXPLOSIONS FROM MUD-BUTT'S POWER-ROD.
THE EFFORT TO BREACH THE RING OF GOBLINS BEGINS WITH A BANG.

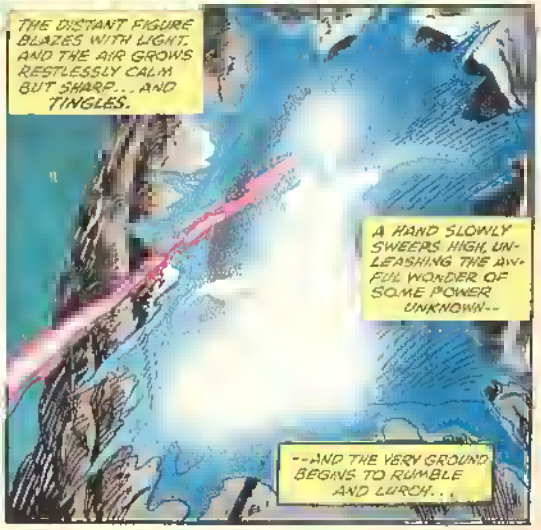

USING SHREEKAR'S SWORD, TYNDALL CUTS AND SLASHES AT THOSE ATTACKERS MISSED BY MUD-BUTT'S MIRACULOUS POWER-ROD -- AND THOUGH GOBLINS FLY EVERYWHERE, OTHERS SURGE FORWARD, SEEKING TO SEAL THE GAUNTLET ONCE MORE.

THEN, AS MUD-BUTT ALMOST BREAKS CLEANLY THROUGH THE GOBLIN RANKS...
WHAT THE--?! I'M PRESSIN' THE GEM-BUTTON--BUT NOTHIN'S SPURTIN' OUTTA THE POWER-ROD!

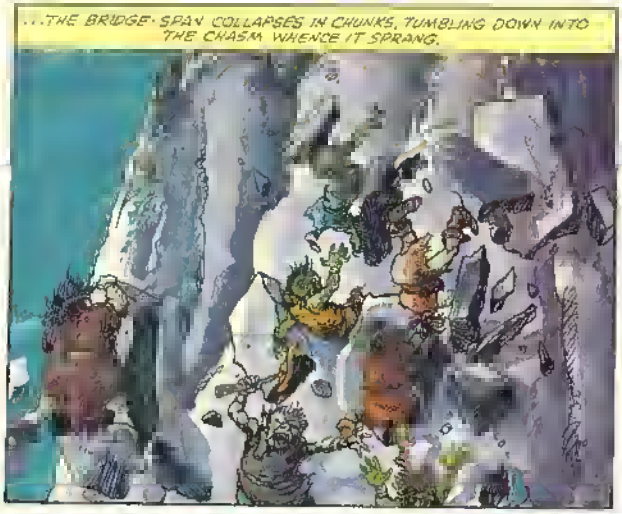
AH! AT LAST I CAPTURE A CRUCIAL PIECE, MY OPPONENT.
EVEN IN YOUR LOST CAUSE, IT WAS GROWING TROUBLE-SOME...

IT'S BUSTED!! THE LOUSY POWER-ROD WON'T WORK! AND WHAT A REVOLTIN' PLACE FOR IT TO HAPPEN-- SMACK IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THESE GOBLINS, WITH SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN SO CLOSE--
--ALMOST WITHIN REACH!


BUT THEN, JUST BEFORE THE BERSERK GOBLINS DESCEND...
LOOK! UP IN THAT CAVERN, NEAR THE TOP! IT MUST BE THE WIZARD-- COMING TO OUR AID!


THE DISTANT FIGURE BLAZES WITH LIGHT, AND THE AIR GROWS RESTLESSLY CALM BUT SHARP... AND TINGLES.
A HAND SLOWLY SWEEPS HIGH, UNLEASHING THE AWFUL WONDER OF SOME POWER UNKNOWN--
--AND THE VERY GROUND BEGINS TO RUMBLE AND LURCH...

THEN IT SPLITS OPEN, A JAGGED GAPING TRENCH WHICH SWALLOWS GOBLINS BY THE SHRIEKING SCORE...
...AND WHICH STRETCHES ALL THE WAY FROM THE BASE OF SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN TO A POINT DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE THREE STUNNED SMALL FOLK...WHERE IT ABRUPTLY HALTS.
WHEW.
ANOTHER ROLLING RUMBLE OF THUNDER AND THEN, SPRINGING UP FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE NEWLY RIVEN CHASM--
WHAT THE--?! BY THE DWARF-MOTHER'S HAIRY TEAT!
IT'S A BRIDGE--A ROADWAY TO THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN!
FAR ABOVE, AT THE ZENITH OF THE ENCHANTED SPAN, THE FIGURE OF LIGHT DISAPPEARS, RETREATING INTO THE CAVERN'S SHADOWS...
HURRY, MUD-BUTT! THEY'RE STILL COMING AFTER US!
AND WHEN THE TRIO REACH THE TOP, SKITTERING INTO THE CAVERN ITSELF...
WISH THERE WAS A DOOR TO SLAM BEHIND US!



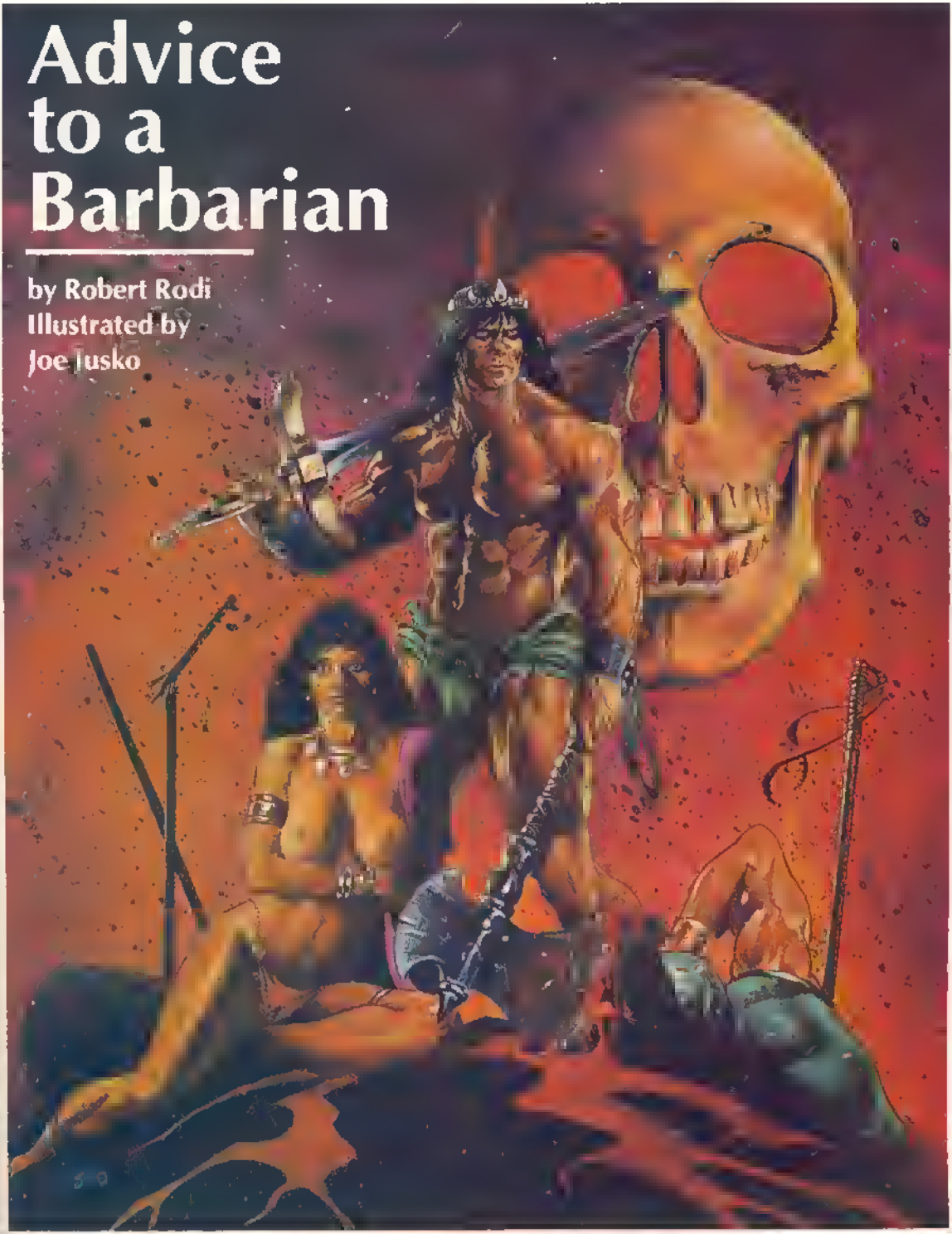
SEE? I *TOLD* YA THE WIZARD OF SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN WAS HOT KREEBLES! I *KNEW* HE WOULDN'T LET US DOWN!
KINDA GLAD TO SEE HIM LET THE *GOBLINS* DOWN, THOUSH...

--A *WOMAN!*
YES, I AM *LIANISSA*, AND I AM INDEED A WOMAN... BUT A SEVERELY *WEAKENED* ONE AT THE MOMENT, MY LITTLE FRIENDS...
MUCH OF MY POWER HAS LONG SINCE BEEN STRIPPED AND GIVEN TO THE OTHER SIDE... SO THAT AS I WEAKEN, THE OTHER SIDE STRENGTHENS...
...AND MY LAST MAGICKING EFFORT--CREATING THE BRIDGE TO GAIN YOU SAFE ENTRY--HAS ALMOST FINISHED ME.
PLEASE...BE NOT AFRAID OF MY HOVERING SOUL-SPRITES. AS LONG AS THEIR LIGHT DOES NOT DIM UNDER THE POWERS OF DARKNESS, THERE IS YET HOPE.
NOW COME CLOSER, LITTLE ONES--QUICKLY--BEFORE THE GLORY THAT WAS LIANISSA... FADES FOREVER...

WEIRDWORLD CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE

Advice to a Barbarian

by Robert Rodi
Illustrated by
Joe Jusko



story ©1982 Robert Rodi art ©1982 Joe Jusko

Prince Hakalot, son and heir of the late King Earlideth V, had had his father's throne stolen from under him by his uncle, the new King Rotenaple I. Within minutes of the coup's accomplishment, the usurping uncle had ordered the execution of his nephew, as he was "a danger to the stability of the crown," and Hakalot was therefore forced to slaughter his way to freedom. Miraculously, he had escaped without a scratch, and had made his way across the vast land of Faranwide, thieving, drinking, wenching, and having adventures. But behind his deceptive appreciation of the good life, there lay a soul stirred by the desire for vengeance; and not a night passed during which Hakalot did not curse his uncle, and revile his name (when he could remember it).

His quest, from which he was, admittedly, often sidetracked, was to find the one man in all of Faranwide who could help him regain the throne that was rightfully his: the wizard Mixenmatch.

And thus it finally came, three years after his quest had begun that Hakalot found himself in the Realm of Mixenmatch himself: the awesome desert, Aridwaste. For days, he crossed the scorching sands, his lips parching, his vision dimming, his sweat glands working at optimum output, until finally, he saw a visitm, on the horizon.

It was a girl, strolling; she was blond, beautiful, aristocratic, and icily sensual. She carried herself with a cool regality, her cloak of deepest purple trailing behind her. A small red creature of indeterminate species scampered around her feet as she walked, as if its entire nervous system had been slipped a mickey.

Despite the desperate state of his health, Hakalot felt the familiar pressure against his loinpouch. He desired this enchantress, and the very thought of taking her gave him his second wind.

He caught up with her. "Woman," he said, standing between her back and the sun, so that his shadow fell over her — a phallic/rape symbol, the significance of which escaped him entirely. All he knew was that it turned him on, but good.

She whirled, facing him with only the barest hint of consternation. "You are addressing me, I presume?" she asked flatly. The creature scampered behind her, and hid beneath her cloak.

"I am Hakalot, Prince of Faranwide, and true heir to the throne of my forefathers. And I — hunger." This last word was more snarled than spoken.

"Well, Prince of Faranwide, neither your hunger nor your majesty will be appeased by your traipsing around Aridwaste. Unless you plan to consume lizards. Or conspire with them."

Anger stung his cheeks. "I came here seeking Mixenmatch."

She smiled. "The wizard, Mixenmatch, you mean."

"Indeed." Her face had been alerted with familiarity when he had spoken the name. Curiosity was born in him, and as his mind could only handle one matter at a time, the loinpouch began to droop. "You have knowledge of him, woman?"

"Yes, man," she said brightly. "He was my father. Not a bad one, either. A bit reclusive, perhaps; but during a girl's teen years, that's just the thing, isn't it?"

He eyed her with bewilderment. "Where he he now?"

"Father! Oh, you're too late. He's bought it."

"I — I do not understand."

"You know. Bought the farm." He did not respond. She sighed in exasperation. "Kicked. Slabbed not. Died. You know, 'the-great-sleep-from-which-none-awaken.'"

Comprehension flickered on his simian face. "Ah, yes!" he said with enthusiasm; then, after absorbing its meaning, "Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes. Sorry to disappoint, but there you are." An awkward silence fell about them. "Well, nice to have met you, your royal highness. Have a nice life."

"No, wait!" he said, grabbing her cloak as she turned to move away. "You must needs give me aid! My wicked uncle has stolen my throne! Only the wizard Mixenmatch could have helped me; he he dead, but you are blood of his blood! Surely, you know some of his secrets, his black arts; surely you can bend men's minds to do your will."

Indeed I can. My name isn't Wotatease for nothing. But my magicks are different from my father's. I can't help you."

"You are an enchantress, Wotatease; this I know. I have seen magick done. I am no stranger to the world. I have seen much, and slain many, but I know my limits."

"I think you may overestimate them," she said brusquely, as she snatched her cloak back from his dirty hands. "In fact, I'm sure of it."

Help me regain my crown! I swear you shall not find me ungrateful. I will make you my Queen. You shall be the shining star of my court, and be celebrated by my people!"

"That's all I need," she said testily, "to lord it over a bunch of people who eat with their fingers." She tried to soften her expression. "Look, Hakalot, you're not a bad sort, but you're just not my type, you see? I may be horribly discriminating, but I'd rather wait for a guy a little higher up the ladder of evolution, if you know what I mean."

He was becoming upset. "You dishonor Hakalot. You think that Hakalot shall not become King. You prophesy his failure."

She sighed. "Well, frankly, yes I do. And if you must know, I'm not a bit sorry about it, either. Like I said, you aren't exactly a bad sort, but — well, how can I put this?" She thought for a moment, then pointed to Hakalot's forehead. "No one's home," she said. "Get my point?"

Hakalot will show you, wench! Hakalot will be the greatest of them all!"

Listen," she said, smoothing back her hair, "you really ought to reassess your apportionment of priorities. I mean, is being King all that important to you? Think about it: even if you do regain your crown — goddess knows it's unlikely, but just for the sake of argument, let's imagine it — what then? You've wasted so much time on this quest for my father, that you'd be overthrowing a government that's been functioning efficiently for three years now! The people will see *you* as the usurper. And woe betide you if you can't maintain that standard of government yourself. Do you have advisers, Hakalot? Men you can trust? Do you have a Chancellor? Do you have a Minister of Finance? Do you have a Council of War? Do you even have a Master of Horse? And if you don't, can you expect all your uncle's people to come over to your side just because you say 'please'?"

Hakalot was silent at length. "Your words are — sobering. I have much to think on." Then, he turned on her, violently. "But there be still honor to consider! Yea, you have forgot — honor be all!"

"Don't be a fool; honor is nothing. Do starving peasants look the other way, and say, 'What the heck, we may die, but our King still has his honor'? Do hostile enemies say, 'Yes, Faranwide is now weakened — but we cannot attack such an honorable ruler'? Wake up and smell the coffee, Hakalot!"

Coffee?"

"Look, why don't you find some nice farm girl with an ample bosom and wide hips, who can bear your not inconsiderable weight without complaint, and settle down in a little tent somewhere to rut your life away in peace? I really think it's all you're good for. I don't mean to be harsh, but the finer points of feudal monarchy can hardly be expected to come easily to someone who is himself just barely bipedal. Think about it."

No, wench; I will not, I cannot. You almost swayed me against my will; such is your siren-call that even mighty Hakalot almost fell to it. But your bewitching days are over, demoness! Prepare to die!"

He lifted his sword high, but Wolatease didn't flinch. Instead, her little creature dashed from beneath her cloak, and sank its teeth into Hakalot's sinewy thigh.

He shrieked in real agony, and dropped the sword. "Call it off! Enchantress, call it off!"

"Sorry," she said. "Unlike yourself, I do not commit tactical errors."

"I will spare you, I swear it!"

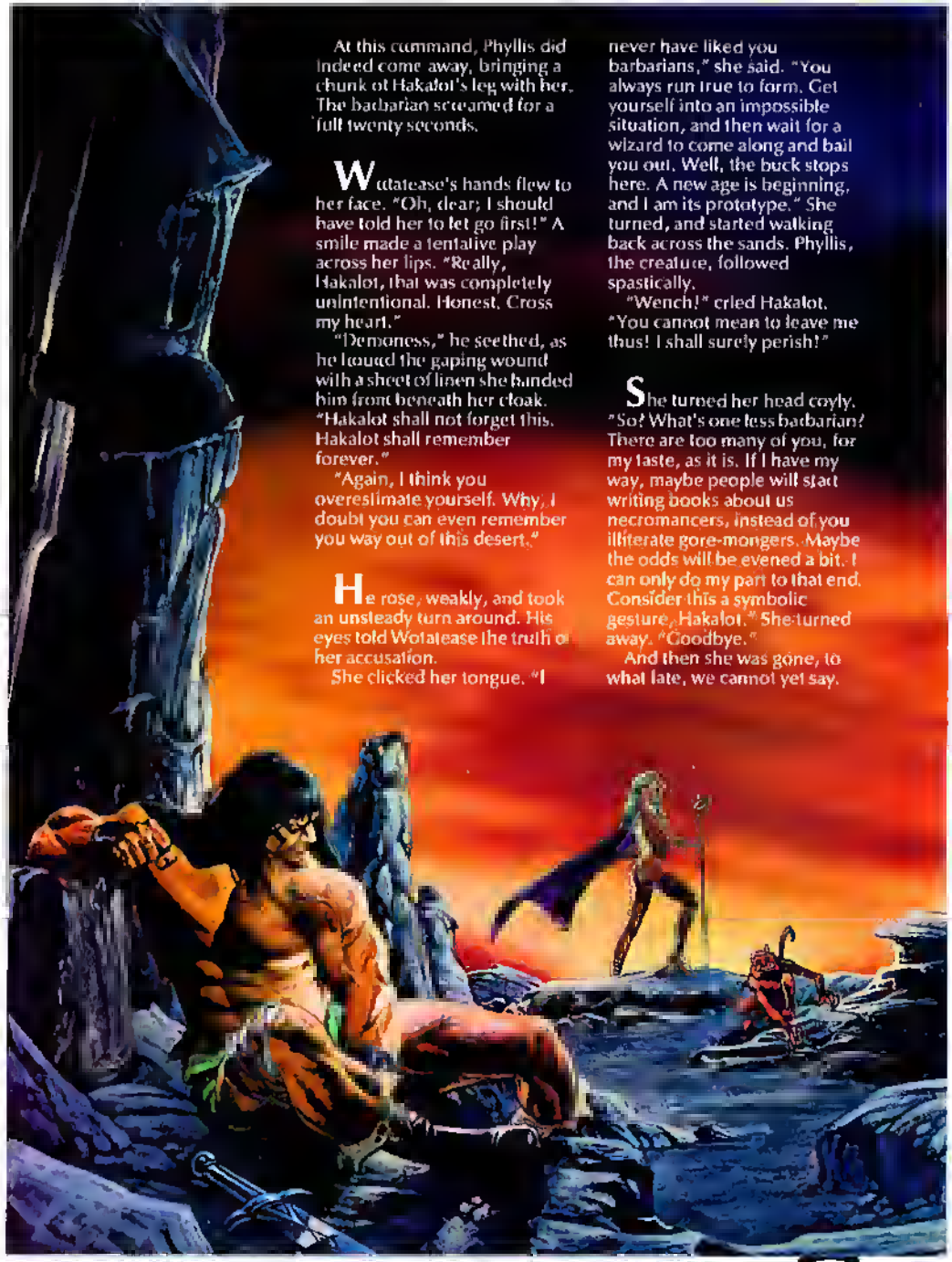
"Oh! How gracious of you. But in case you hadn't noticed, *I'm* the one in the bargaining position, not you."

He fell, tears in his eyes, kicking his leg violently; but the creature determinedly kept its toothy hold. "Then — say on!" he cried. "What will you?"

"I don't know," she replied, biting a finger. "Let me think..,

"By all the gods!" screeched Hakalot, as he pounded his massive fists against the sands. "I cannot wait long!"

She sighed, and shrugged her shoulders. "Guess this round goes to you, Prince. I can't think of a thing I want from you. Come away, Phyllis," she said to the creature.



At this command, Phyllis did indeed come away, bringing a chunk of Hakalot's leg with her. The barbarian screamed for a full twenty seconds.

Wotatease's hands flew to her face. "Oh, dear; I should have told her to let go first!" A smile made a tentative play across her lips. "Really, Hakalot, that was completely unintentional. Honest. Cross my heart."

"Demoness," he seethed, as he bound the gaping wound with a sheet of linen she handed him from beneath her cloak. "Hakalot shall not forget this. Hakalot shall remember forever."

"Again, I think you overestimate yourself. Why, I doubt you can even remember you way out of this desert."

He rose, weakly, and took an unsteady turn around. His eyes told Wotatease the truth of her accusation.

She clicked her tongue. "I never have liked you barbarians," she said. "You always run true to form. Get yourself into an impossible situation, and then wait for a wizard to come along and bail you out. Well, the buck stops here. A new age is beginning, and I am its prototype." She turned, and started walking back across the sands. Phyllis, the creature, followed spastically.

"Wench!" cried Hakalot. "You cannot mean to leave me thus! I shall surely perish!"

She turned her head coyly. "So? What's one less barbarian? There are too many of you, for my taste, as it is. If I have my way, maybe people will start writing books about us necromancers, instead of you illiterate gore-mongers. Maybe the odds will be evened a bit. I can only do my part to that end. Consider this a symbolic gesture, Hakalot." She turned away. "Goodbye."

And then she was gone, to what fate, we cannot yet say.

Her mother was the first-born of Caesar. Her father, a prince in his own land, a slave in Rome. At the age of four, Marada saw her father broken on the rack, disemboweled and, finally, drawn and quartered. It was a public execution and, though the Prince was a long time dying, he uttered not a sound. That night, Marada's mother fled the Eternal City, taking her child to be raised free, far from the place that had claimed the life of her beloved. That was twenty years ago. The child is a woman now, and that woman a warrior known and respected throughout the Empire as. . .

MARADA, THE SHE-WOLF
BY CHRIS CLAREMONT AND JOHN BOLTON
BUT WHEN SOUGHT AND FOUND BY DONAL MacLLYANLLWYR, WARLORD OF FABLED ASHANDRIAR, SHE HAD CHANGED ALMOST BEYOND RECOGNITION. THE PROUD WARRIOR WAS NO MORE; IN HER PLACE, A MEEK, COMPLIANT, SUBMISSIVE WENCH.
SHE'D BEEN CAPTURED BY A WIZARD, RAVISHED BY HIS DEMON LORD, AND THOUGH HER BODY HAD SURVIVED THE ORDEAL, HER SOUL HAD NOT. UNKNOWN TO HER, THE SORCERER DISPATCHED A DEMON TO RECAPTURE HER. UNKNOWN TO HER AND DONAL BOTH - IT HAS FOUND HER!
ARE YOU SO TERRIFIED BY WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU THAT YOU TURN YOUR BACK ON WHAT YOU ARE?
WHAT AM I, DONAL? WARRIOR? WOMAN? BOTH? PERHAPS IT WAS FOOLISH OF ME TO THINK MY SKILL AT ARMS MADE ME SAFE, INVIOLATE.
AT LEAST NOW I HAVE NO ILLUSIONS.

story ©1982 Christopher Claremont art ©1982 John Bolton

THAT IS GOOD, SHE-WOLF. FOR THAT MEANS THOU SHALT BE AS PLEASED TO BE REUNITED WITH THY CONSORT, YGARON, AND HIS BRETHREN AS THEY WILL BE TO WELCOME THEE.
AHHRRR!!
DONAL!
BY THE GREAT GODS WHAT ?!?
DOST THOU NOT RECOGNIZE THY TRUE SELF, MARADA-- FORMED OF A SYNTHESIS OF THINE ESSENCE WITH THAT OF THE MABDHARA?
THOU ART PROMISED TO THE LORDS OF THE ABYSS, BOUND TO THEM BODY AND SOUL, 'TIL THE END OF TIME. LONG HAVE I SOUGHT THEE.
AND NOW THAT I HAVE FOUND THEE,..
KEEP AWAY!
...NOTHING SHALL KEEP ME FROM DELIVERING THEE TO MY DREAD MASTERS.
AAIJI..!
MY SHOULDER -- BURNS LIKE IT'S BEEN SPLASHED WITH ACID!
THE DEMON'S CLAWS MUST BE POISONED!
TAKE A LAST, FOND LOOK AT THY WORLD, BITCH, FOR THOU SHALT NE'ER AGAIN BEHOLD IT.
NO! PLEASE-- NO!
LET HER ALONE!
A-arianrhod?
A GOOD SHOT CHILD RHIANNON TAUGHT YOU WELL.
FATHER, MARADA, ARE YOU BOTH ALL RIGHT?! WHAT WAS THAT THING?!
A... PIECE OF MYSELF.
I'VE MINDCALLED THE GUARDS, BUT IT WILL TAKE THEM TIME TO REACH US. LET US AWAY FROM HERE, YOU TWO, QUICKLY. WE'RE TOO VULNERABLE...

SCUM, DIOST THOU THINK A SINGLE ARCANE BOLT...
...COULD SLAY A REAVER OF THE ABYSS?!
THINE ARROGANCE SHALL COST THEE DEAR!
DONAL ARI RUN! IT'S ME SHE WANTS!
ASHANDRIAR IS MY STRONGHOLD, STARHAIR. I AM PLEDGED TO PROTECT ALL WHO RESIDE WITHIN ITS BOUNDRIES.
BOLD WORDS, WARLORD. THEY WILL MAKE A FITTING EPITAPH.
NOW, SHE-WOLF IT IS THY TURN.
I STRUCK YOU DOWN ONCE, REAVER. I CAN DO SO AGAIN.
MARADA, TAKE FATHER AND GET OUT OF HERE!
I'LL COVER YOU!
THY BOLTS OF ELDRITCH FIRE CAN HURT WHELP - - BUT NOT KILL!
I SENSE A POWER WITHIN THEE THAT RIVALS MARADA'S. I SHALL TAKE THEE TO MY MASTERS THEY SHALL BE PLEASED TO HAVE TWO SACRIFICES FOR THE PRICE OF ONE.
MARADA!
ARI!!
SECONDS LATER, SECONDS TOO LATE, RHIANNON ARRIVES WITH A SQUAD OF WARRIORS TO FIND MARADA CRADLING DONAL'S LIMP, BLOODY FORM IN HER LAP, STARING DRY-EYED INTO SPACE, HER FACE SUFFUSED WITH AN OMINOUS, DEADLY CALM. OF ARIANRHOD, THERE IS NO SIGN.

FOR A DAY AND A NIGHT, MARADA STANDS ALONE ATOP THE HIGHEST TOWER IN ASHANDRIAR, WRAPPED IN DONAL'S CARACALLA· HIS SCARLET WARCLOAK·--WHILE RHIANNON FIGHTS TO SAVE HIS LIFE.
NONE DARE DISTURB HER SOLITUDE.
IT'S ME THE TRIAD WANTS.
BUT THEY WON'T EXCHANGE ARI FOR ME. IF I GO, THEY'LL TRY TO KEEP US BOTH. BUT THAT WAY, AT LEAST SHE'LL HAVE A CHANCE.
IF I STAY, SHE HAS NONE.
I SO DEARLY WANT TO STAY.
HULLO, MARADA.
I FELT DONAL CALL ME IN MY MIND.
HE'S DYING, ISN'T HE?
YES.

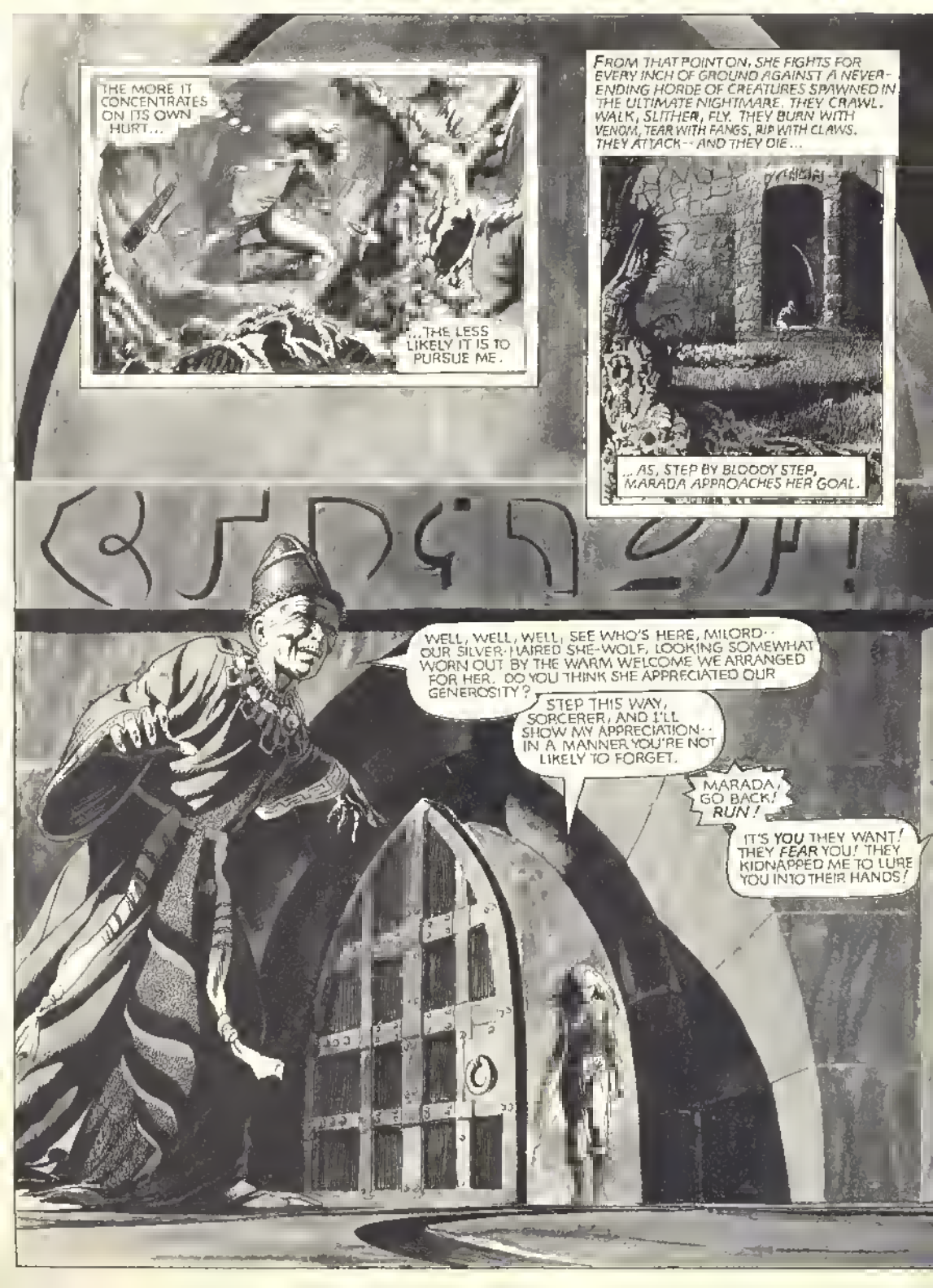
THE PAIN OF HER LOSS IS UNENDURABLE. SHE WANTS TO RUN AWAY WITHIN HERSELF, TO COWER ONCE MORE BEHIND THE WALLS SHE'D BUILT AROUND HER HEART. BUT SHE DOES NOT. SHE SITS BESIDE DONAL UNTIL HE BREATHES HIS LAST, THEN KISSES HIM FAREWELL AND FOLLOWS RHIANNON TO THE AGED SORCERESS' INNER SANCTUM.
HE LOVED YOU VERY MUCH.
AND I LOVED HIM.
THOUGH I WISH I'D KNOWN IT SOONER.
I CAN SEND YOU TO ARIANRHOD, MARADA, BUT BEYOND THAT I CANNOT AID YOU. EVEN MY POWERS HAVE LIMITS.
I UNDERSTAND RHIANNON.
IF IT'S HUMANLY POSSIBLE TO RESCUE HER, I SHALL. IF NOT, I GUARANTEE SHE'LL NOT LIVE TO BECOME THE TRIAD'S PLAYTHING.
AND YOURSELF, STARHAIR?
FOR ME, I GUARANTEE NOTHING. I MAY LOOK THE PART OF THE SHE-WOLF, BUT IT'S AN EFFORT TO KEEP FROM SHAKING.
I'VE NEVER FELT SO AFRAID, RHIANNON.
YET YOU ARE DETERMINED TO PROCEED?
I MUST.
MY BLESSINGS GO WITH YOU - DAUGHTER OF MY HEART. AND MY LOVE!
THE SPELL IS CAST, THE GREAT WORDS OF POWER UTTERED, AND IN A FLARE OF THE PUREST WHITE LIGHT...
...MARADA VANISHES FROM EARTH.

TO THE EYE, MARADA STANDS IN A NOISOME EARTHY SWAMP.
SHE KNOWS BETTER. HER SOUL KNOWS IT FOR WHAT IT IS, A REALM AS ALIEN AND INHOSPITABLE AS THE SURFACE OF THE MOON, POSSESSING A FUNDAMENTAL WRONGNESS THAT RUBS HER NERVES RAW.
THE AIR IS THICK WITH THE STENCH OF PRIMAL CORRUPTION. THIS, TOO, SHE RECOGNIZES -- FROM THE MOMENT OF YGARON'S APPEARANCE IN THE WIZARD'S TOWER.
THIS IS HIS DOMAIN -- BESIDE WHICH TARTARUS PALES IN COMPARISON -- THE NADIR OF THE ABYSS, THE BOTTOM OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT, WHOSE UNIMAGINABLE DESOLATION CRUSHES ALL LIFE, ALL HOPE.
Y'GARON MUST BE AWARE THAT I'M HERE. I WONDER WHEN HE'LL MAKE HIS MOVE -- AND WHAT THAT MOVE WILL BE?

RHIANNON SAID HER SPELL WOULD LAND ME IN ARI'S IMMEDIATE VICINITY...
... AND SINCE THAT MOULDERING TEMPLE IS THE ONLY STRUCTURE IN SIGHT, IT SEEMS AS GOOD A PLACE AS ANY TO BEGIN MY SEARCH FOR HER.
OUTLAND BITCH, YOU'LL FIND NOTHING HERE BUT THE DEATH YOU SO RICHLY DESERVE!
A DEMON!
REACTING WITHOUT CONSCIOUS THOUGHT, MARADA SPINS AND FIRES...
AAIIII--!
... AND A FIERCE EXULTATION GRIPS HER AS THE ARROW STRIKES HOME.
I DREADED THIS MOMENT. I FEARED THAT--WHEN I WAS FINALLY CHALLENGED-- I WOULD FREEZE, BE UNABLE TO FIGHT. BUT, FOR ALL MY FEARS...

..THE WARRIOR IN ME STILL LIVES-- UMPH!
BUT NOT FOR LONG, MAMMAL!
TO SLAY ONE OF US MAY BE A SIMPLE MATTER, BUT OUR NUMBERS ARE LEGION! ALL THE MIGHT OF FABLED ROME ITSELF COULD NOT PREVAIL AGAINST US!
THAT, PIT-SPAWN, IS A BOAST...
GARGH!
...UTTERED BY THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER FELT THE MIGHT OF ROME.
THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT!
THE EASE WITH WHICH I SLEW THESE DEMONS AUGERS WELL FOR THE FUTURE, BUT I MUSTN'T DELUDE MYSELF. I'VE PROVEN NOTHING 'TIL I'VE FACED THE MONSTER WHO'S HAUNTED MY DREAMS THESE MANY MONTHS- Y'GARON.
HE WILL BE MY TRUE TEST.

MINERVA PROTECT ME!
IT'S SOME HUGE, HELLISH KIND OF OCTOPUS. ITS TENTACLES ARE FOUL AS SEWER SLIME TO THE TOUCH-- AND THEY BURN!
A COLD FIRE... REACHING INTO MY MIND... NUMBING HEART AND... SOUL!
IT'S-- CRUSHING ME!
CAN FEEL... BONES GRINDING--, ALMOST NO AIR IN LUNGS-- ONLY SECOND... LEFT TO ACT...
MY BODY... TWISTED AT AN AWKWARD ANGLE--
--I... CAN'T MUSTER MY FULL STRENGTH... FOR EACH BLOW. BUT, DIFFICULT THOUGH IT MAY BE, I MUST TRY!
GODDESS BE PRAISED-- I'M FREE!
DONAL'S AXE WAS SO SHARP, EVEN A CASUAL, HALF-HEARTED STRIKE DID THE TRICK.
THE MONSTER IS IN AGONY-- GOOD

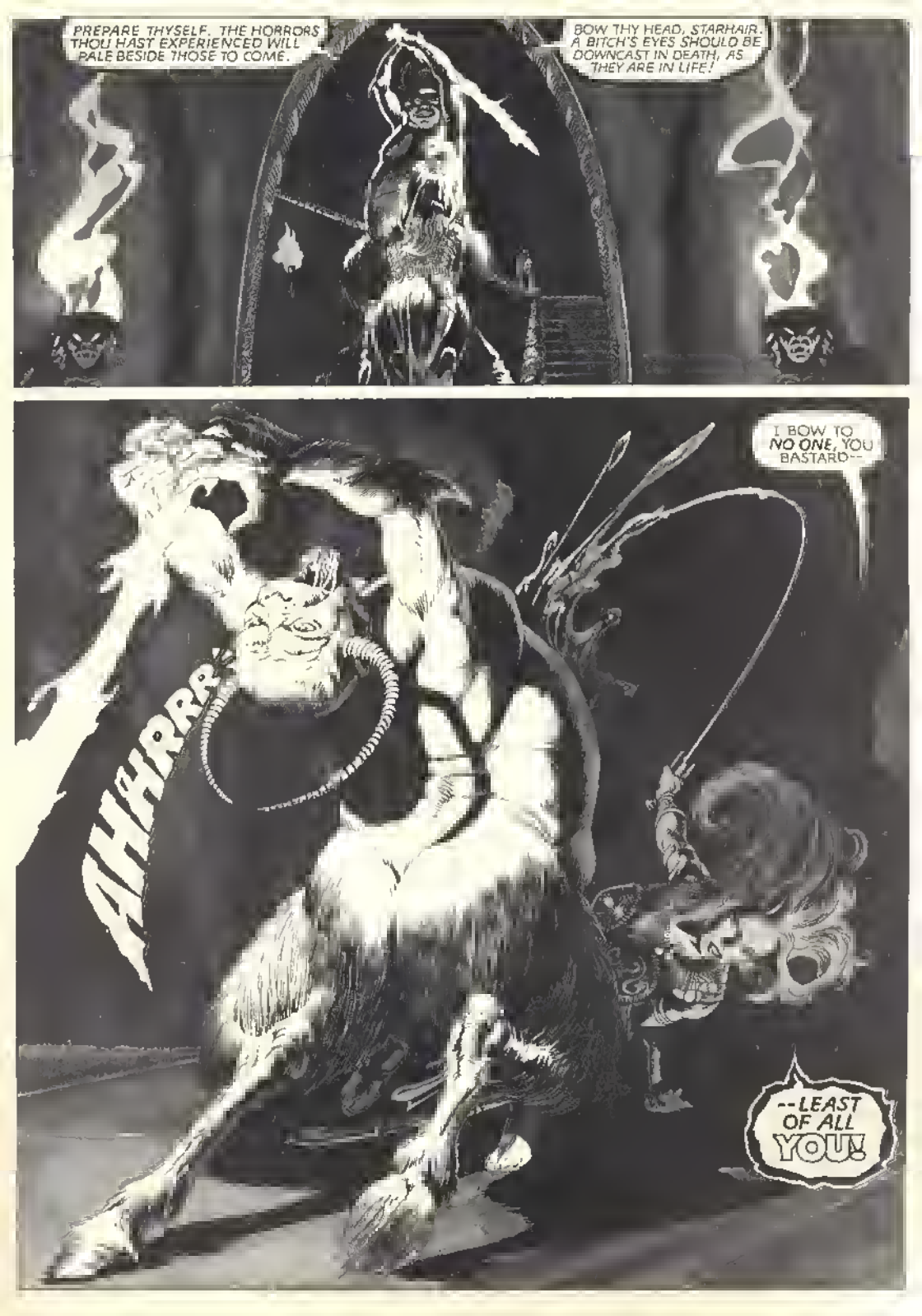

THE MORE IT CONCENTRATES ON ITS OWN HURT...
...THE LESS LIKELY IT IS TO PURSUE ME.
FROM THAT POINT ON, SHE FIGHTS FOR EVERY INCH OF GROUND AGAINST A NEVER-ENDING HORDE OF CREATURES SPAWNED IN THE ULTIMATE NIGHTMARE. THEY CRAWL, WALK, SLITHER, FLY. THEY BURN WITH VENOM, TEAR WITH FANGS, RIP WITH CLAWS. THEY ATTACK -- AND THEY DIE...
...AS, STEP BY BLOODY STEP, MARADA APPROACHES HER GOAL.
WELL, WELL, WELL, SEE WHO'S HERE, MILORD -- OUR SILVER-HAIRED SHE-WOLF, LOOKING SOMEWHAT WORN OUT BY THE WARM WELCOME WE ARRANGED FOR HER. DO YOU THINK SHE APPRECIATED OUR GENEROSITY?
STEP THIS WAY, SORCERER, AND I'LL SHOW MY APPRECIATION -- IN A MANNER YOU'RE NOT LIKELY TO FORGET.
MARADA, GO BACK! RUN!
IT'S YOU THEY WANT! THEY FEAR YOU! THEY KIDNAPPED ME TO LURE YOU INTO THEIR HANDS!

BE SILENT, CHILD. THE SHE-WOLF KNOWS THAT. SHE WISHES TO PROVE HERSELF BY PITTING HER PATHETIC HUMAN MIGHT AGAINST THAT OF MINE -- FORGETTING THAT SOMETHING WHICH HAS ONCE BEEN SHATTERED AS SHE WAS WILL NEVER AGAIN BE AS STRONG.
A LORD OF THE ABYSS FEARS NOTHING, MARADA -- AND ESPECIALLY NOTHING HUMAN. THOU ART OUR RIGHTFUL PREY, FIT ONLY FOR SLAUGHTER. SO IT WAS AT THE DAWN OF TIME -- AND SO IT SHALL BE AGAIN!

THY TOYS WILL AVAIL THEE NAUGHT. LAY THEM DOWN... AND LAY THYSELF DOWN BESIDE THEM, THAT I MAY ONCE MORE TAKE PLEASURE FROM THY COMELY FORM.
THEN, THOU MAYEST WATCH AS I DESPOIL THE GODDESS-CHILD.
SINCE YOU DESIRE ME, AND MY WEAPONS, Y'GARON
--THEN BY ALL MEANS, HAVE THEM!
MY ARM!
THOU HAST DRAWN BLOOD!
I KNOW THE LITANY, DEMON LORD. BEFORE YOU'RE THROUGH, I'LL BEG FOR DEATH, AND YOU'LL LAUGHINGLY REFUSE ME.
CRAVEN WHORE! THOU SHALT PAY FOR THAT!
MANY HAVE THREATENED ME. MANY HAVE LIVED TO REGRET IT.
--THIS IS THE MOMENT OF TRUTH. AS Y'GARON SAID, HE BROKE ME-- HE KNOWS IT, I KNOW IT-- AND HE'S CERTAIN HE CAN DO IT AGAIN. WHILE I... I... AM CERTAIN OF NOTHING.

MARADA MAKES THE FIRST MOVE
ANDY'GARON PARRIES EXPERTLY, HIS SWORD SMEARING A TRAIL OF FIRE THE LENGTH OF MARADA'S BLADE OF ELDRITCH STEEL.
THIS SWORD WAS FORGED FOR DONAL
YET ITS WEIGHT AND BALANCE FEEL PERFECT FOR ME.
I'VE NEVER HANDLED SO MAGNIFICENT A WEAPON.
IT FEELS AS IF IT WAS MADE FOR ME, AS IF ITS A LIVING EXTENSION OF MY OWN BODY!
A MIGHTY SWING, SHE WOLF! 'TIS A PITY THOU DIDST MISS!
A PITY, Y'GARON, THAT YOU DON'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TRUE ATTACK--
--AND A FEINT!
AAAIIIY!
ACCURSED WENCH! THOU HAST HURT ME!
OH, DREAD MASTER OF THE ABYSS, I MEAN TO KILL THEE!
AGAIN AND AGAIN, THEIR SWORDS CROSS IN A SERIES OF BRIEF, FIERCE ENGAGEMENTS....

... AND AS THE DUEL PROGRESSES·· NEITHER COMBATANT SEEMINGLY GIVING AN INCH, OR SLACKENING THE BRUTAL PACE·· A SLIGHT SMILE MARKS THE CORNERS OF MARADA'S MOUTH, SHE MOVES WITH INHUMAN GRACE, ONE BLENDING FLUIDLY WITH THE NEXT, MAKING Y'GARON SEEM SLOW AND CLUMSY BY COMPARISON
I WOULD NOT HAVE BELIEVED IT POSSIBLE! MARADA IS DRIVING Y'GARON BACK! IF NOT STOPPED, SHE MIGHT ACTUALLY DO THE UNTHINKABLE -- AND SLAY ONE OF THE MABDHARA!
HE TRIES TO BREAK THROUGH HER GUARD WITH SKILL, THEN SMASH HIS WAY THROUGH USING BRUTE FORCE. BOTH METHODS FAIL. FOR AN INSTANT, THE BATTLE HANGS IN THE BALANCE. AND THEN, SUDDENLY, IT IS THE DEMON WHO IS ON THE DEFENSIVE.
I MUST PULL THE SHE-WOLF'S FANGS - AT ONCE!
THAT SCENT -! THE SORCERER HAS CONJURED... FLOWERS! THEIR PERFUME... DULLS MY MIND... IT'S BECOMING... SO HARD TO... TO THINK... WHILE THEY MAKE MY BODY... INCREDIBLY SENSITIVE...
THE SLIGHTEST TOUCH... IS A CARESS. I ACHE. I HUNGER!
FRAILTY, THY NAME IS WOMAN.
DAMN YOU... MONSTER!
WHY, BECAUSE I HAVE SHOWN THEE THY TRUE NATURE?


PREPARE THYSELF. THE HORRORS THOU HAST EXPERIENCED WILL PALE BESIDE THOSE TO COME.
BOW THY HEAD, STARHAIR. A BITCH'S EYES SHOULD BE DOWNCAST IN DEATH, AS THEY ARE IN LIFE!
I BOW TO NO ONE, YOU BASTARD--
AHHRRR!
--LEAST OF ALL YOU!

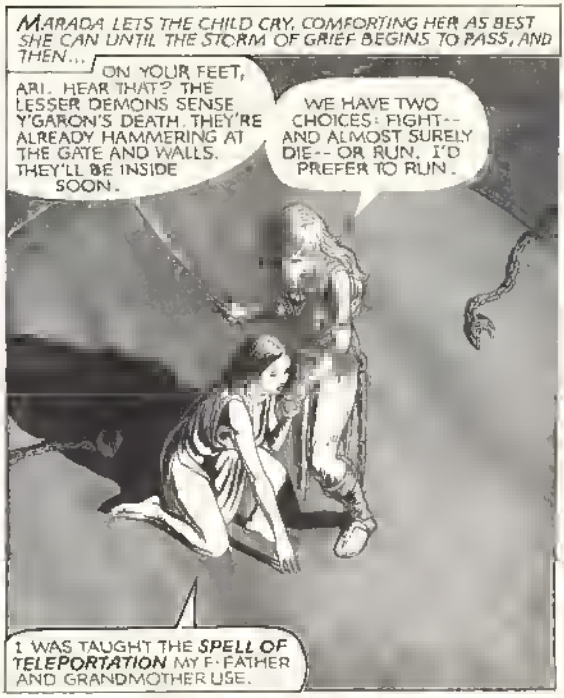
YOUR MASTER IS NO MORE, NECROMANCER.
SAY YOUR PRAYERS, BECAUSE YOU'RE ABOUT TO FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE.
WHAT·· WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!

WHAT A *SHE-WOLF* DOES BY NATURE
WHAT A WOMAN WHO'S BEEN RAVISHED DOES BY *RIGHT!*

NO! YOU'LL NOT CLAIM ME!
I WILL FLEE THIS PLACE, MARADA, AND WHEN THE MABDHARA SEEK THE MURDERER OF THEIR BROTHER...

...I SHALL POINT THE WA··
URRGH!
IF SO, SIMYON KARASHNUR, YOU'LL DO IT FROM YOUR GRAVE.
Y'GARON'S DEATH WAS FOR MYSELF. YOURS IS FOR DONAL!
WE ARE *BOTH* AVENGED!

ARE YOU WELL, ARI? DID THEY HARM YOU?
THEY... THEY THREATENED, BUT I WASN'T EVEN TOUCHED. I'M SO... SO GLAD YOU CAME, MARADA. I WAS SO SCARED. BUT WHY DIDN'T FATHER COME WITH YOU? YOU'RE WEARING HIS SWORD. IS HE ALL RIGHT?
NO, MY DARLING. DONAL IS DEAD.


MARADA LETS THE CHILD CRY, COMFORTING HER AS BEST SHE CAN UNTIL THE STORM OF GRIEF BEGINS TO PASS, AND THEN...
ON YOUR FEET, ARI. HEAR THAT? THE LESSER DEMONS SENSE Y'GARON'S DEATH. THEY'RE ALREADY HAMMERING AT THE GATE AND WALLS. THEY'LL BE INSIDE SOON.
WE HAVE TWO CHOICES: FIGHT-- AND ALMOST SURELY DIE-- OR RUN. I'D PREFER TO RUN.
I WAS TAUGHT THE SPELL OF TELEPORTATION MY F- FATHER AND GRANDMOTHER USE.

THEN CAST IT, CHILD, QUICKLY
HER VOICE SURPRISINGLY FIRM, ITS TONES BOOMING THROUGH THE TEMPLE, ARI WORKS HER MAGIC WITH ALL THE POWER AT HER COMMAND. THERE'S A BLINDING FLASH OF LIGHT, A DISORIENTING WRENCH IN THE FABRIC OF REALITY...

...AND A DECAYING TEMPLE IN A DAEMONIC SWAMP GIVES WAY TO A RUINED TEMPLE IN A JUNGLE.
I DON'T MEAN TO BE CRITICAL, ARI, BUT RHIANNON DID IT BETTER.
I SHOULD HAVE PAID MORE ATTENTION DURING MY LESSONS. DID THE SPELL WORK, THOUGH? ARE WE ON EARTH?!
WE'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH IF WE AREN'T.

BUT HOW WILL WE GET HOME? I COULD ALWAYS TRY THE SPELL AGAIN.
I THINK NOT, UNLESS IT'S ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. FOR THE NONCE, MY GIRL, WE'LL USE THE MEANS THE GODDESS GAVE ALL MEN AND WOMEN, OUR LEGS.
LET'S GET STARTED, ARIANRHOD. IT'S LIKELY TO BE A LONG WALK HOME
AND IT WAS.

A short run from the sewer plug and he was hidden by the shadow of the monstrous spaceship. Unarmed, he knew the direct approach was the only way to get by the guard.

The interior of the ship was cool and moist and dark. Kyba was a cooler, moister and darker planet.
He saw no one. Every alien had been sent planetside to search for the bomb; and here it was walking through the mother ship.

He began to sweat; if he had figured wrong, he was dead. But then he saw what he wanted — the Kyban was obviously a doctor.
English! You speak English! Good, now, you'll stay alive, Doc; but don't try anything cute. There's gotta be an operating room around here — you're gonna take me there and do a little surgery on me; and one move that looks wrong and I take off the top of your skull, understand? Great.
Now move it!

Tallant refused even a local anesthetic. He sat propped up, a silver-shaft revolver pointed directly at the medic. The Kyban stared at the cylinder of the gun, saw the little capsules in their chambers, thought of how they were fired through the altering mechanism to come out as raw energy, and he wielded the electroscapel with care.
In twenty minutes it was over. The operation was a complete success.
As the incision firmed up under the alien epidermizer, Tallant studied the bomb's mechanism. Then he motioned to the doctor.
Now graft the bomb to my stump.
It took ten minutes of pistol-whipping for Tallant to realize the medic would go only so far and no further. He would not do as he was [illegible] his own will.
It took some doing, but he got the full demolishing dose into the alien's nostrils.
When he awoke, he would do *anything* for another of the packets in Tallant's pocket. Tallant wanted one thing: the sun-bomb grafted to his arm where he could detonate it in an instant.

There was no pain.
The bomb was set into the stump with a simple wire hookup that would detonate under several circumstances:
If Tallant consciously triggered the bomb.
If anyone tried to remove it against his will.
If he died and his heart stopped.
The Kyben doctor had done his work well.
Sure Doc, you can have the snuff. But first take me up-decks to meet your Commandant.
This is the last man on Deald's World speaking, my Kyben friends. I'm the man you've finally realized carries the sun-bomb. But now I control it. I can set it off at will and blow this planet to dust...and you with it!
The medic directed Tallant to the communciations console and patched him through to the Kyben armada; to the men in the field, to the ships ranged across the field, to the skelton crew of the ship in which he stood.

But you have no reason to fear me. I'm going to offer you a deal far superior to anything you had as mere soldiers. I offer you the chance to go anywhere you wish as warriors with worlds at your command.
Does it matter who leads this fleet? As long as you conquer galaxies, I don't think it does.
Our first destination...
EARTH!
He didn't hate anyone now. He was above that.
He turned away from the port and looked about at the ship that would mold his destiny, knowing he was free of Deald's World, free of the dust. He needed neither now.
Now he was God on his own.
Now he would get even.